

The Spellmaker

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The Spellmaker

by [SonnyGietzel](#)

Summary

Latin; a dead language with no practical applications except perhaps the deciphering of old texts and as a particularly quaint party trick.

Thankfully, as Harry finds out, Latin is not as dead as he was first taught when he decided to learn the language. It wouldn't have mattered anyway, of course; he loved Latin, and would have been proud to know it even had it been as useless as it was pretty. But in the world of Wizards, the world of Magic, Harry realizes his rare talent with words is particularly valuable, and allows him to use magic that no one's ever heard of, that no one's ever seen. But as time goes on, and he becomes more and more entangled in the webs spun by those around him, he starts to realize just how deep the magical rabbit hole goes and how dangerous power like his can be.

All Harry had ever wanted was for the world to make *sense*.

Notes

Hello! This is my first story, I hope you like it!

I'll be changing the tags and adding some warnings as the story goes along, so watch out for those.

03/10/20: I'm back to this story after a six year hiatus :D Ch14 onward is all brand new! Some retroactive changes were implemented, but don't mind those.

For anyone interested, I have a few recommendations for things to keep in mind while reading this story to make it all as enjoyable as possible:

1) Unreliable narrator is a very important tag, and never stops being relevant no matter who the narrator is.

2) Moral ambiguity is also a very important tag, both with characters and the events that occur.

3) Characters in this story are definitely based on their canon counterparts, but who they actually are at their 'core' will often be rather different. In other words, although similar on the surface, when it comes down to it the people in this story are totally different people from those in canon.

4) This story is 100% purely fictional in every way, shape and form, and none of it is meant to be taken too seriously :D

I really, really hope you enjoy this story! Thank you for reading! <3

Principium

Chapter Notes

Russian Translation by [XYDO: The Spellmaker \[Russian\]](#)

Thank you so much! <3

When Harry Potter was 4, he discovered a new world. This world was only a few streets away from Number 4, Privet Drive, where he and his relatives lived in relative peace. It was next to the grocery shop Aunt Petunia liked to go to twice a week, at 9 am, to make purchases for her home, and Harry had taken to being dragged along with her. With Uncle Vernon at work, and Dudley at Boxing Summer Camp, there was no one at home to leave Harry with. Therefore, he was dragged behind his aunt and made to stand outside in the sweltering heat which seemed to permeate into his head from the vaguely cloudy sky above and into the soles of his feet from the cement below.

The first day of this arrangement, Harry merely stood outside the shop for the three hours it took Petunia to gather her truck-load worthy amount of food, enough to feed five elephants or the two male Dursleys. He nearly fainted from the heat, and was allowed, in a rare show of mercy from his aunt, to skip his afternoon chores and collapse into bed after drinking a glass of water.

Summer without Dudley was at once better and worse than any summer previous. On one hand, Dudley wasn't there to make Harry miserable with derogatory insults and increasingly sharper blows that Harry was learning through experience to escape and avoid. On the other, his Aunt and Uncle treated him like he was invisible and untouchable, barely a wisp unless he somehow displeased them. He did chores, ate, did more chores, slept, repeat. Every day, repeat, and Harry felt more and more that perhaps one day he would dissolve into the misty English air and no one would notice.

The second day of this arrangement, Petunia ushered Harry to the shop and told him that he should go out and find a patch of shade to stand under.

"I will not have you fainting on me while I am taking care of the groceries. Imagine what people would say!"

He was, of course, not to touch anything, not to speak to anyone and, most of all, not to get into trouble. He could go anywhere as long as he was back in front of the shop by the time Petunia came back out. He couldn't go on along with her, because people inside *knew her*. She couldn't be seen with him, of course. Harry nodded, and trotted off to the other side of the street, where a large building loomed with a great expanse of shadow on the steps leading inside it. He sat there and prepared to wait.

About 10 minutes later, he felt a tap on his shoulder, and he jumped slightly, turning to see a young woman standing above him.

"What are you doing here, little boy? Are you lost?"

Harry shook his head, then bit his lip. He didn't want to break his aunt's rule of not speaking, but thought that it was more important not to get into trouble.

“I’m waiting for my aunt. She’s buying groceries, and told me to stay out of trouble.”

The woman smiled down at him. “Well, why don’t you come on inside? It’s cooler there, and you can read something if you like.”

Harry smiled, then the smile slipped off. “I’m not allowed to read. Aunt Petunia says only stupid people like reading.”

The woman frowned, and Harry feared he’d upset her, his eyes growing wide.

“That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard,” the woman said, fiercely. Harry shrunk back, fearing her anger. Her face softened as she saw him recoil. “Not you, sweetheart. Your aunt. Books are wonderful. They open up new universes for you, all the information you could ever want, at the tip of your fingers.” Her eyes had glazed over and she seemed to be staring off into the sky. She then looked back at Harry. “What’s your name, dear?”

Harry hesitated, then decided saying his name didn’t go against any of Petunia’s rules he wasn’t already breaking. “Harry.”

“Well, Harry, do you like reading?”

Harry nodded hesitantly. Initially he’d read as much of Dudley’s books as he could, learning to read himself by sitting on the other side of the door when Petunia tried to teach her son. Although Harry wasn’t there with them, Dudley was so stubborn in his desire not to learn that Petunia had to teach each lesson over and over, slower and slower until he got it by sheer amount of repetition, and Harry was easily able to catch up and begin reading on his own after a few months. His aunt and uncle never bothered to teach him, and yet they never questioned his ability to be able to read. He suspected this was more because they’d never really noticed he could and he had decided, in a split moment of certainty, that this was one ability that was perhaps better they should never discover of him until he went to school and could claim came from there.

As such, he’d taken to taking any of the books he could find into his cupboard, and reading there. No one noticed the missing books, because no one bothered to look for them. He didn’t understand many of the words, but as he read more and more he began to understand some of them through context. At the moment he was half-way through Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. He’d been working on the book for the past few weeks, but the Old English was at once harder and more entertaining to attempt to decipher. Unfortunately for Harry, given the dislike the Dursleys felt for books, the only ones they owned were either for teaching, as with Dudley, or for show, such as the complete works of Shakespeare. They owned many cooking books, thankfully, and those served to at least partly bridge the gap between the two extremes. Harry, obviously, still only at best understood half of what he read but it was enough to get the gist of what was happening. He hadn’t any idea about how complex the books he was reading were, for he knew of no other books. Therefore, he didn’t feel discouraged as he traipsed through, only decided to eventually understand it all.

“How long until your aunt needs you back?”

“Three hours, ma’am.”

The woman smiled thinly, clearly displeased at the notion that Harry’s aunt would leave such a young boy alone for that amount of time. “Well, then, Harry, why don’t you come inside? You can grab any book you like, and read until you have to go.”

Harry’s eyes widened, surprised at her offer. No one had ever said anything like that to him, had

made it appear like they actually *wanted* him around. Usually he was either ignored or told to go someplace else.

“Really?” he said. She smiled.

“Really really.”

She took his hand and led him inside the building, and Harry could see that above the door the letters read, ‘Library’.

The air inside was indeed cooler than outside, but what struck Harry was the sheer quiet of the place. He was accustomed to the usual hustle and bustle from the town and the vague sense of people needing to be places and seeing things that usually came along with being on the streets. In the house there was always the sound of a TV on or, when Dudley was home, of screaming and the constant thrum of his waddling about the house. Vernon could often be heard either laughing or speaking thunderously, and although Petunia was quieter she was still often muttering under her breath.

Harry absorbed the clear smell of the Library, decided he liked it, and smiled. He turned to the woman, feeling excited about the future for the first time since he could remember.

She smiled down at him. “My name is Sandra Smith. You may call me Sandy. What kind of books do you like, Harry?”

“I’m half-way through *The Merchant of Venice*. It’s by a man called Sh...Shake...”

“Shakespeare?” she finished for him, her brow furrowed and her voice light with disbelief. “You’re reading Shakespeare?” She then smiled lightly at him. “It’s okay, Harry. I mean, what are you *actually* reading?”

Harry frowned at her, not understanding her question. He *was* reading the book...unless reading involved doing something else? Maybe he’d misunderstood what reading meant?

“I...I am. I mean. I am?” he said, unsure. She sighed, thinking that the boy had heard of Shakespeare and was trying to sound smarter than he was by claiming to read some of it. She’d met some kids who did that, although to his credit they weren’t 4, and didn’t try to claim Shakespeare.

“Well, then, what’s the plot?” she asked. If she was to help the boy she’d rather give him something he’d actually enjoy, rather than something he’d try to read only to feel upset when he failed.

“What’s a plot?” Harry asked. He’d never seen or heard that word before.

“I mean, what’s the story about?”

Harry understood then that she was testing him. He still wasn’t sure why she was doing that, except that she obviously thought he was lying.

“Well, I’m only halfway through...” he said, softly, looking at his feet. Sandy smiled and crouched down.

“It’s okay. Just tell me up until what you know.” Sandy knew that calling children a liar to their faces was never the way to go. It was better to have the children admit their faults and then help them get through them.

“Okay then. There’s a man, a merchant. He’s called Antonio.” Harry’s brow furrowed as he tried to remember the words he’d read, the proper terms to recount the...plot. “He has a friend called Bass...Bassanio? I think? He needs money for a girl, but Antonio has no money, I didn’t really understand why. And there’s another guy called Shylock, who lends money, although he’s not very good at it. He’s a Jew.” Here Harry paused. “What does ‘Jew’ mean?”

Sandy had gone quiet and her face was blank, but she hurried to answer him. “It means that you believe in the God of Israel. Originally, they speak Hebrew.”

“What’s Hebrew? And why do Antonio and Shylock hate each other so much?”

“Hebrew is an old language, like Latin, although Latin is dead. As for Shylock...that’s rather complicated. Lots of years of hatred between Christians, those who believe in the New Testament and Christ, and Jews, who believe in the Old Testament, and that the Prophet has yet to come.”

Harry was lost halfway into her explanation, but he’d gathered enough to understand that Shylock and Antonio’s rivalry would not be easily resolved, if at all. “What do you mean, Latin is dead? How can a language die?”

Sandy smiled ruefully. “I mean, no one speaks it anymore. Those that know it only do for scholarly purposes, such as deciphering old texts. It’s a real pity, too. It’s a very beautiful language, and is the mother of many modern languages. *Triste est quia mortuus est.*”

Harry’s eyes widened at her words. For some reason, they sent a shiver down his spine, and he felt suddenly that this language, that beautiful sound that had flowed from Sandy’s mouth, was something he had to learn for himself. He felt it from somewhere deep inside and, with the same determination that he’d used to plow through Shakespeare, he knew that this dead language, Latin, was one he had to know.

“*Triste est quia mortuus est,*” he repeated, haltingly. He winced at his pronunciation, knowing instinctively that it was awful, and vowed to correct it. The taste of the words in his mouth was like nothing he’d ever felt before, though, a pleasure unequalled by any food he’d ever eaten and only vaguely approached by the pleasure of learning a new word. In his 4 year old mind, he’d found his ambrosia, and there was nothing better.

Sandy was looking at him with surprise.

“That was Latin. Do you speak Latin?” he asked, eyes wide and smile grand.

Sandy looked startled at how excited he suddenly looked. “Well...yes. I studied Latin in university. It’s like school for older people.”

“Will you teach me?”

Sandy’s eyes grew incredibly wide before she laughed. “Oh, Harry. Latin is a very difficult language, more so because no one speaks it anymore. There’s no real reason to learn it, really, just for deciphering old texts or as a particularly quaint party trick. It’s not just something you can learn in a day, it takes many months, maybe even years to learn properly.”

Harry nodded vigorously. Her words did not deter him; if there was one thing Harry had, it was time. Besides, he saw the entire process not as a fault, but a gain. He loved learning new words; learning English, a process he considered still ongoing, was already interesting enough, despite how terrible Aunt Petunia was at teaching, and Dudley at learning. Harry learned.

“*Triste est quia mortuus est,*” he said, once again, more sure this time. His mouth broke into a grin.

He loved the sound! “Please, Sandy, ma’am. Please, I’ll do anything!”

Sandy, despite her misgivings and feeling sure that Harry would give up within the week, nonetheless felt she must allow the child to reach his limits himself. She smiled. After all, he had been reading Shakespeare! As ridiculous as it may seem, he clearly knew the plot, and from what he’d said about his aunt Sandy doubted the woman had been the one to read it to him. A thought suddenly hit her.

“Harry, where are you parents?”

Harry shrunk into himself. “They’re dead. They died when I was 1, in a car crash.” Then he looked up at her with eyes filled with hope and joy. “Please, please. Will you teach me Latin?”

And Sandy couldn’t say no. She was torn between the shocking news of this child’s parents and the sheer childish glee at such a ridiculous notion as learning Latin. She nodded, and watched in amazement as Harry smiled beatifically at her.

“Thank you, thank you so much!”

Sandy smiled again. She almost felt like she was betraying him, as she led him over to her desk, where she kept all her books. Soon, the boy would realize that learning the language wasn’t fun at all, and he’d give up easily, and all his joy would be lost. It felt horrible, but she knew she couldn’t deny him when he looked so happy at the prospect.

She took out a book, one of the first ones given to her by her Latin teacher many years ago, which was exceedingly simple and which she felt comfortable Harry could understand on his own. She then took him to sit with her at one of the tables near her desk. As the librarian, she was still at work, and so would eventually need to actually do something. While there was nothing else to do, she’d help Harry. If nothing else, it was rather more entertaining than sitting at her desk working on her thesis. There was, however, enough work to keep her occupied throughout the day, so she couldn’t simply sit down and teach Harry herself, though she might want to.

Little Harry was practically vibrating in his chair as she opened up *Latin for Beginners*. As a technical book, the entire first section was devoted to understanding the basic grammatical and syntactic rules of Latin, and giving a background on the language. She turned the book towards Harry, who immediately leaned forwards and began to look.

“Do you want me to read it to you?” she asked. Harry looked up at her.

“You don’t need to. You have chores, right?” She nodded, faintly amused at his word choice. “I can read through this on my own. Thank you very much for the book, it looks wonderful.”

Sandy didn’t know if she’d call it that, but nodded as she stood. “Call me if you need clarification with anything. I’ll be sitting right over there.” She pointed to her desk. “If you want, you can look at any other books too.”

Harry nodded, smiled again, and then pulled the book closer to him and began to read. Sandy watched with fascination as his eyes moved from side to side at an astounding speed for a 4-year-old, although she could feel that every once in a while he would trip over a word. She then went and got Harry a dictionary.

“It’s for when you don’t know what a word means,” she said, when Harry looked at her questioningly. She showed him how to use it, and when she was done Harry looked like he might hug the dictionary.

“That is the greatest book I’ve ever seen!” He exclaimed in fascination, and Sandy wondered what kind of small little boy Harry was that he was excited by a dictionary.

She left Harry to his own devices, wondering when he would come up to her. She soon became absorbed in her own work, and time flew past the two of them.

A while later, Sandy glanced at her watch and saw that it was 11:50. She looked up, amazed to still see Harry crouched over the Latin text, with the dictionary open haphazardly next to him. She stood and came up next to him, tapping his shoulder. Harry took a moment to react, looking up at her slowly, as it dragging his mind out from the book.

“Harry, it’s 10 to 12. Your aunt will be looking for you soon.”

Harry once again took a moment to react, then set down the Latin text reverently, gazing at it as one might a beloved friend. He then gathered the dictionary close, and looked up at Sandy haltingly, hesitantly. She smiled softly at him.

“What is it, dear?”

“Sandy, do you...do you think I could borrow this book?” He must have recognized Sandy’s expression of shock, for he quickly elaborated. “It’s just, it has so many words in it! And it’s so long, and I could use it to better read *The Merchant of Venice*, and all the other books with words I don’t know, and the Dursleys don’t have one, and it’s so wonderful, and it explains everything so well and I loved reading it and...”

“Harry,” she interrupted him softly. “It’s alright, you may have it. I have many dictionaries, one less will not many any difference. Besides, few people use them. I gift it to you so that you may continue to read and love reading.”

Harry’s eyes had widened comically as she spoke. Then he smiled grandly. “I...thank you. Thank you so much! I mean...you don’t have to...I can just return it in a few days...I don’t...” he seemed to trip on his words. He clearly wished to own the book, but didn’t want to seem like he wanted to. Sandy placed a hand on his shoulder.

“It’s alright, Harry. A gift from me to you. Of course, you can still come here whenever you want. I can’t give you the Latin text, but you can read it here as often as you wish.”

Harry nodded, and it looked like he was about to burst into tears. “Thank you, thank you, thank you so much.” He then stood. “I have to go. But thank you. I will be back this Saturday. I will be coming here Wednesdays and Saturdays. Is that alright?”

Sandy walked him to the door. “That’s perfectly alright, sweetheart.” He nodded, smiling, then walked out the door, down the steps and over to stand in front of the grocery shop. Sandy watched him with curiosity as, when he reached the other side, he quickly slipped the dictionary under his large shirt. She wondered if this had to do with his aunt saying that only stupid people read, and shook her head in disgust at the fact that some people believed that, more so that Harry, that wonderful boy, had to live with people like that.

A woman stepped out of the shop a minute later, turning to Harry and saying something sharply. Sandy knew this must be his aunt, and watched them hurrying down the street to disappear a few moments later.

She hoped Harry would be back. She’d never met a little boy like him, and wondered that she ever would again.

Periculum

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Sandy! Sandy!”

Sandra Smith, better known as Sandy, looked up from her book. She smiled as a thin boy with raven black hair came running up to her, clutching a large book to his chest. Her smile dimmed slightly as she saw slight discolorations around his eyes and on his arms; she knew the boy was not treated well at home, and for a while now had tried to help him in any way she could. The boy, Harry, refused any attempt she made at speaking with his relatives, and instead recounted only how his life was not all bad and how he had much to be thankful for.

“I could be getting beaten, or being starved,” he’d say, shrugging his bony shoulders, which could not be hidden fully under the large sweater he always seemed to be wearing. He looked healthier than he had when Sandy had first seen him, almost 6 years ago, a tiny child begging her to teach him Latin. He no longer looked malnourished and strangely small for his age; he’d grown taller and had filled out lightly, although he was still very thin.

Now he dropped in front of her his latest conquest, a copy of Cicero’s *De Finibus* in the original Latin. Sandy had found it for him after he’d requested it of her, having finished reading *Brutus*. She marveled once again at his ability to devour so easily books which she herself, and many scholars she knew, had trouble going through, and none with as much enthusiasm or interest as Harry demonstrated.

“How did you like it?” she asked, putting the book away behind her desk. Harry smiled, jumping from foot to foot excitedly.

“It was very interesting. Cicero is a marvelous author, obviously, but the way he...*mutat...mutati...* oh yeah, shifts, between his own philosophical stand point and that which he considers to belong to the...” He paused again, frowning. “...*populus*...what’s the word...” His expression cleared. “Right, people. The way he shifts between his perspective and that of the people is very interesting.” He shook his head with a soft laugh. “Sorry, I just finished reading it right now; my mind is still half in Latin.” Sandy laughed along with him, admiring this bilingual child who was caught between such strange tongues.

He suddenly looked furtive. “Sandy,” he said softly, and she peered at him worriedly. He walked over to the other side of the desk, next to her, so they could speak more privately.

“I’ve been working on *it*, Sandy. I can now control it a lot better.” He grinned. “Look, look! *Ignis!*”

On his spread hand a small ball of fire suddenly appeared, caught between his fingers and emitting a soft glow. Sandy’s eyes widened and she glanced around to make sure no one was looking before turning back to Harry. Wonderful, strange, ethereal Harry.

“That’s amazing Harry,” she said, softly. She felt unease grow inside her, twisting before she pushed it back again. Harry’s grin stretched.

“And look at this! *Draco Ignis!*”

The ball of fire suddenly stretched and morphed, growing longer and suddenly spiraling around his

hand. Sandy recoiled slightly, fearful that her clothes might catch fire, as what was now clearly a dragon made out of fire moved around on Harry's hand. Harry giggled, then suddenly bit his lip as the fire collapsed into his hand and snuffed out. He pouted.

"I can't hold it for too long, though," he said sadly. Then he looked up at Sandy. "Isn't it cool, though?"

"Very cool," she said, trying not to show in her voice the concern she could feel growing over the past months. Ever since Harry had begun being able to perform this magic – for there was no other word for it – she had felt more and more that something great was about to happen. She hadn't told anyone. No one would believe her, first of all, but more than that she felt that if anyone should be made aware then Harry himself was who should decide it. She worried that if anyone found out, he might be made into a government experiment, or tortured for his power. She feared for little, innocent, brilliant Harry, and his fascinating power.

"What's wrong?"

She shook her head, looking back down at Harry who looked up at her with worry. She smiled.

"Nothing's wrong, sweetheart. Just thinking about my paper, I have to turn it in by tomorrow." It wasn't a complete lie, she really did have a paper for tomorrow, and Harry knew enough about her work load to accept the excuse without question. He was such a good boy. She patted his arm gingerly, careful not to press on any bruises. She felt her anger at the boy's relatives flare once again. Obviously, who caused the bruises was his cousin. Harry never denied it, which from a boy as taciturn and unwilling to point fingers as Harry was, was practically an admission of guilt.

"Have you got me the *Satyricon*?" Harry asked, his face shining with excitement. "I've wanted to read that book for ages!"

Sandy chuckled. "Not yet, Harry, sorry. I'm getting the book in about a week, yet. I've got Dante's Divine Comedy, though, if you want to go for that."

Harry smiled. "Oh yes, please! I've wanted to read that one, too. *Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni.*"

Sandy's brow furrowed. "What's that?" she asked as she dug out the copy of the Comedy and placed it on her desk. She reached out for Harry's library card.

"It's from *Inferno*, that's the first section of the Divine Comedy. It's one of the more famous lines. It means 'Forth go the banners of the king of hell'."

She felt a shiver go through her at his words. "That sounds rather like a bad omen, doesn't it?"

"*Absit omen,*" Harry said, giving her his card. She swiped it, before giving it back to him, along with the book. He took it and hugged it to his chest, smiling. She smiled back. It made her happy to know that at least she could help in this; he looked so very happy with a book in his hands, like no one she'd ever met. She hoped he would retain this love even as he grew.

"I've got to go, now," Harry said, reluctantly. She nodded, knowing the boy was only allowed out at all because his relatives didn't actually want to be accused of abusing the boy. Even so, it was best not to test them. He suddenly reached into his pocket and brought out a small silvery object. He held it out to her and she took it in her hands. It was a small piece of metal, and upon closer inspection she realized it was actually a small, vaguely horse-like silver figurine. It was crude, and not the best workmanship, but still quite clearly silver. She turned to Harry, who was looking at her doubtfully.

“Do you like it? It’s a gift for you.”

“It’s very nice, Harry. Thank you very much.” She said, smiling. He smiled back.

“I made it with my magic. I don’t know how, but it looked pretty and I thought you might like it,” he said. She blinked, looking back at the horse and then back at Harry, who looked as if he might be scared she would shout or otherwise hurt him. It made her sad that a boy as wonderful and special as Harry might fear something like that from anyone, especially from her, but she understood where he came from and knew it was hard to suppress instincts like that. She placed a soft hand on his shoulder.

“It’s wonderful, and very special. You are a real sweetheart, Harry.”

Harry smiled softly. “I’m glad you like it,” he said.

He then walked out the library with the Comedy clutched tightly in his arms after waving goodbye to Sandy. She watched him go fondly, if a little sadly. She wished that the boy would never grow and would never have to face the world, but knew it was a futile hope. She only hoped he would be as happy as he could be, and that her beautiful, innocent boy would not be overly hurt by the world.

“*Absit omen*,” she repeated softly, as the boy disappeared down the street.

Harry arrived at Privet Drive taking care of making nary a sound, wary of his cousin’s presence. If the *bruta cetis* saw him with a book he might attempt to take it, and Harry would be forced to resort to more extreme measures. He climbed up into his room and sat down on his bed, placing the Divine Comedy gently in front of him; he noted faintly that tomorrow was his birthday. It didn’t much matter to him, honestly. His birthdays were never celebrated, and he often forgot about them because they were about as important to his every-day events as faraway stars. He’d never told Sandy when it was, despite her questions. He honestly saw no point in making it out to be an important event when it wasn’t.

He silently cast a spell to muffle any sounds he made, then placed a charm which would warn him to anyone approaching his room with a murmured, “*Monere Accessus*”. He grabbed a few crumpled pieces of paper and, with a few muttered words, transformed them into a large, succulent apple which he took a bite out of, savoring the slightly acidic flavor.

He didn’t like lying to Sandy; she was very kind to him, and Harry had grown rather fond of her. However, he knew that she saw him as a small, innocent boy who had to be looked after, and who was to be protected from those around him. She also had strong morals; he knew she saw the bruises on his arms and felt anger towards those who would hurt him. She felt that the good people of the world ought to be protected and the bad people be punished. Obviously she would have formulated the idea in a much more long-winded and complicated manner, but that was the gist of it.

Harry had only ever shown her a tiny bit of his magic. He didn’t want to alarm her into telling anyone else of what he could do; a little bit of fireworks were harmless, and he could show off ‘progress’ to keep her thinking that he was merely playing about. However, Harry was much more proficient than he had allowed her to think.

Since his first bit of accidental magic when he was 5, Harry had practiced day in and day out on his

magic, feeling through the Latin words he knew and read for those which he resonated particularly strongly with and playing with them until results came about. By now, he could cast noise-muffling spells without even having to say the words; a clear thought was enough. He'd cast the spell so often that it was by now nearly instinctive, but for most spells he still had to verbalize his thoughts in order to provide the magic with a more focused and tangible guide.

Most of the words' effects had to do with their meaning, obviously, although Harry suspected that that had more to do with his own understanding than of the powers belonging to the words themselves. If, he wondered, he truly believed that ice and fire were the same thing, would saying *Ignis* cause something to freeze? He'd tried to experiment with this idea, but after many failed attempts he'd come to the conclusion that he simply lacked the proper teaching method that it required.

The small metal horse was one of his first more complicated, successful transformations, from back when he was 7. His attempt to turn wood into metal took many weeks; it was a lot more difficult than a more natural change, so to speak. He could change water to ice easily, a simple *Glacio*; the basic make up was the same and so Harry didn't really have to force anything, just kind of push with his magic in the right direction.

But wood to metal was harder. It took a full transformation; Harry couldn't simply say 'Freeze!' He had to actually change the wood fully. He tried saying, "*Mutare Metallus!*" but that only resulted in his magic fluttering about, feeling much like it was confused. It didn't know how to change wood into metal, because Harry didn't know how to do it.

Therefore, he'd gone to the library and began to browse through books on chemistry. Sandy hadn't said much, treated it like another one of Harry's odd interests. He'd learned the Latin names of the elements, for he felt those held both more beauty and more power; he'd learned about electron configurations and about the basis of nuclear radiation and nucleosynthesis, the two processes through which an element could be turned into another. He also learned that wood itself was composed of a large variety of elements, and that 'metal' was not quite as specific a term as he'd first thought.

Eventually, after feeling he had a solid grasp on the idea of nuclear transmutation, he retreated once more into turning wood into silver. He'd chosen silver, *argentum*, because it was the metal with which he felt most comfortable with, having touched and seen it enough from polishing it at his relative's house that he knew its texture and look by heart. Wood, he saw, was mostly comprised of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. With that in mind, he then began sifting through his knowledge on the four elements and playing with the idea of separating each element into its constituent parts and then rearranging them into silver's configuration of 47 protons, 61 neutrons and 47 electrons.

When he felt that he had the idea solidly down, he went back home and, waiting until midnight to make sure his relatives would not suddenly walk in on him attempting magic, turned to the piece of wood which he had set down on a sheet of plastic on the small desk in his room. He didn't want to inadvertently end up turning the whole desk; his relatives knew he could perform magic, but they believed he had no control over it. He'd been given Dudley's storage room after the event two years ago when he'd managed to lift Dudley and throw him across the room without touching him. His relatives feared him slightly after that; not enough to actually act on it, but enough that Harry was left well enough alone most of the time. He'd done it without much thought and out of an instinctive reaction of fear, chanting "*Vade retro, vade retro,*" softly under his breath as Dudley

had approached him with the clear intention of causing harm to both Harry and the book he held clutched between his arms. The next moment, Dudley had been thrown backwards and Harry was being ushered into Dudley's old room. Nothing had happened to his cousin, fortunately or unfortunately depending on your source, but since then Harry had been given a decent berth and he'd started learning magic.

He was well prepared for his first proper attempt at the transformation. He had several small pieces of wood with him, all of similar size and shape, from the same tree in the backyard. He wasn't sure what the tree was, but he figured it didn't much matter to the elementary configuration. He first called out, quietly but firmly, "*Silentem Obice*," focusing on a circle around him one meter in radius. His magic snapped to attention, and he suddenly felt the sounds from around the house hush. He knew from experience that no one outside his bubble could hear him or anything else inside while his magic kept it active. At first, keeping the shield had taken a great deal of concentration, but as he used it more and more often, and as the idea of silence was not particularly hard to grasp, he eventually became proficient enough to hold it for about an hour while paying it little mind. The barrier itself kept anything from going in or out, be it energy or people; it was a security measure he always took in the case that an experiment went haywire. He'd learned his lesson when he'd first started playing with fire, literally. The barrier surrounded the desk, floor and walls, and going only a little ways behind and around Harry. He wasn't going to risk setting the desk on fire or creating a hole on the floor or ceiling, as that might be a little hard to explain.

He then focused on himself, muttering "*Tegmentum*." He felt his magic wrapping around himself as if a second skin, forming a light but very strong body armor. He'd also learned his lesson on protecting himself from his experiments. He then turned back to the wood, gathering his magic and focusing on chemistry and Latin.

"*Iugo*," he said, and no sooner could he feel the magic taking effect that he was suddenly thrown backwards into his shield as a thunderous roar assaulted his ears. His last thought as he passed out was that he should have realized that the spell, as he was using it, would effectively turn out to work as a miniature nuclear bomb.

Harry waited a few days to try again. His relatives hadn't heard anything, and Harry himself had only suffered a few bruises apart from feeling magically and physically drained, so he was confident that the precautionary spells had held for a while, at least. The piece of wood itself had vanished completely; Harry suspected his spell had worked exactly as he'd intended it to, if perhaps in a rather more showy manner than he had anticipated. The problem, he eventually concluded, was that he'd allowed the particles too much energy. He'd fed them all they needed to separate, so when the time came to join, all that extra energy – and there was a lot of it – had to go somewhere.

He had then set about thinking how he would go about merging the subatomic particles without exploding his room. He was thankful his magic had only managed to separate and incorporate a few atoms before it had retreated instinctively; otherwise he feared for the neighborhood's safety.

Eventually, he came up with the idea of converging both the separation and the merging of the particles into a single chain reaction; in this manner, rather than Harry himself feeding the particles all the energy they needed for their separation, Harry would only prompt the first particle himself and then guide the resulting energy into the next atom. This would result in a more efficient use of energy and would hopefully mean that there would be much less energy left over from the change.

The word for the spell he eventually settled on was *Fies*; it was at once less specific and more dependent on his will, and Harry deemed the word appropriate for what he was attempting to do. He set up the experiment as he had last time, although now he placed a sound barrier between

himself and the wood. *Tegmentum* would protect his body from any great harm, but his eardrums were sensitive enough that he worried that a repeat of the explosion from last time might rupture them anyways.

He once again focused on the wood, this time concentrating on a seamless, mostly internal transmutation between wood and silver. When he felt confident he and his magic knew what he was doing, he spoke.

“*Fies Argentum.*”

He braced himself for an explosion, but nothing came. Instead, he watched in fascination as the wood slowly but surely began changing. It became harder, shinier, silvery. Eventually, the transformation finished and Harry felt his magic recede into his body. He canceled the protection spells and approached the desk, holding the silver up to the light.

It had many imperfections; it was far from a perfect piece of workmanship, and Harry thought whimsically it looked vaguely like a horse. He wondered if the many dips and pits in the metal were from the porous nature of wood, and how he might work around that. He also noted that the metal was warm, and wondered if perhaps that was excess energy from the nuclear transmutation, and if there had been any sound which he hadn’t heard. He placed the silver in one of the drawers of his desk and crawled into bed with a satisfied smile gracing his lips.

Harry glanced at the apple’s core he held in his hand.

“*Ignis.*”

The core burst into flames. Harry himself wasn’t burnt by the flame, even though he knew it would if he allowed it. It was careful control that he’d learnt over many nights nursing signed hands and which he preferred to what he felt was the more crude method of protecting his skin with *Tegmentum* every time he wanted to set fire to something. He wasn’t yet proficient in the art of healing skin so that it would leave no scars. He’d started studying molecular biology a while back to try and understand how flesh naturally knit itself together, but he was still having trouble with perfectly correct skin. He had a designated region on his upper arm which he used to practice both his lighter cutting spells and his healing spells. Of course, any potentially harmful spell was first thoroughly tested on inanimate objects before he would dare subject his own body to any potential mishaps. He’d rather not be his own guinea pig, but he had no other live subjects on which to test his magic.

Once the apple core was fully consumed, Harry flicked away the small amount of ashes and opened up the Comedy. He had yet to manage to perform a spell to actually cause something to disappear; his mind rebelled against the idea that something could go from existing to not existing so suddenly. He’d considered trying to fully dissolve an object into energy, but decided that that was probably not a wise option, given the disaster that his initial attempt at transmutation had resulted in. Harry sighed and, deciding that the book in front of him deserved his attention, delved into the adventures of Dante Alighieri through the layers of his hell.

Hello again!

I just wanted to say I am so very happy people like this story, you are all so very kind.

It makes me very happy as the author! Thank you!

I hope you like this chapter, any questions or comments or suggestions are always welcome.

Ingressio

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry awoke the morning of his 11th birthday with a sudden, inexplicable sense that something important was going to happen. The feeling passed as quickly as it had arrived, and Harry shook it off. He glanced at the clock on his bedside table; it was 6 am, and Harry roused himself and went down to the kitchen. In the early morning light, everything seemed subdued, a welcome change from the often hurried and hasty ambient the house usually held during the mornings.

Harry didn't go to school; he'd only gone there for a few weeks when he was five and had decided that he was losing his mind and his time in the place. He'd already learned how to read and write in English, and was advancing quickly in Latin, there was no need to explain to him how Mary and the Dog liked to chase each other around a park. The math had been interesting, until he'd realized he could advance in that too much more quickly with the books Sandy could give him that in a class filled with children who really only wanted to chuck building blocks at each other.

Oh, and the other children; Harry had never been particularly social, in any sense of the word. Sandy was the only person outside his relatives that he had frequent contact with, and she was the only one who he'd approach willingly. He considered the other children simply too young to bother forming relationships with, despite being his age. He certainly didn't feel five, not in the way the other children did. It wasn't that he felt they were stupid, it was simply that what interested them did not interest Harry, and what interested Harry did not interest them.

The teachers were a problem as well. The first time he'd brought one of his Latin books over, the section on Augustus from *De Vita Caesarum*, – which he'd started reading because it had a consistent format and so he could easily guess the words even if he didn't know them– his homeroom teacher had come over and asked what he was reading. When he'd explained, she'd laughed in his face and with a simpering, condescending smile tried to take the book away from him so he would go "play with the other children. You can look at the nice, pretty book later."

Harry had almost thrown the book at her.

He hadn't, obviously. He respected the book too much to use it as a measly projectile. Instead, he had put it away and quietly joined a group of the children near him who were making puzzles. They were very simple puzzles, 10 pieces only, and Harry could have easily solved them all in half an hour, but he didn't want to draw more attention to himself.

The next day he had gone up to his relatives and very calmly explained that he was not going to return to school. When Uncle Vernon exclaimed that he was not the one who decided that, Harry threatened to expose himself and his relatives through public displays of magic. Things were quickly arranged after that, with the Dursleys arranging a 'school transfer' and then simply leaving Harry at home all day. They didn't trust him as far as they could throw him, obviously, but they also understood that Harry would not burn down the house he lived in and besides, there wasn't much they could do about it either. Talk about an orphanage had been quickly shut down when Harry pointed out that he still knew where his relatives lived, and knew their names. They all avoided Harry like the plague for a few months after that, then simply treated him even more like he was invisible. Harry liked that just fine.

They still treated him like that now that he was 11. He had proven himself useful around the house, cleaning and gardening while his relatives were away. Truthfully, Harry had first begun his chores

as a practical way to practice his magic. Even now, as he prepared an egg and made some toast, he was flexing his magic around the stove so that the egg would be perfectly cooked. It was a lot trickier than simply setting fire to something, or holding a flame in his hand. Here the temperature had to be kept constant and yet low enough not to burn the food; it wasn't an exercise for his Latin, but rather his control over his magic. Harry was becoming a lot better at it, but it was a very slippery sort of grasp; his magic wanted to thrash around, and it twisted and turned like an angry snake whenever he tried to channel it into delicate matters.

He placed the slightly singed egg on a plate, then retrieved the toast from the toaster. He didn't dare try to mess with electronic appliances too much; electricity was very hard to control and even harder to get to do exactly as he wished. He rather trusted transistors and diodes much more than he did his own ability with magic, at least in that respect.

Harry ate his breakfast leisurely as the house slowly began to wake up. He could hear the thunderous footsteps of his cousin and uncle, as well as the slighter shuffling of his aunt as they got ready for their morning routines. He finished eating and washed his plates just as they all began coming down the stairs for breakfast. Harry placed the dishes away as they all sat down and Petunia began to fix them breakfast; he was about to go back to his room to grab a book when he heard the familiar sound of letters being dropped in the mailbox.

Harry usually never minded the mail; there was never anything for him anyways, so there was no point. However, this time, he felt something odd.

Harry had been practicing with his magic so much all around the house that he had effectively saturated the place with his magical signature. It was exceedingly pure in a way magical homes rarely were; the family had no access to any other forms of magic, be it through people or foreign magical objects. As such, the sudden taint in the air felt to Harry like an invasion into what he essentially considered his territory; the sudden intrusion of a foreign magical presence.

Of course, Harry had no idea that this was what he was feeling; he'd never been exposed to other magical beings or influences, and had only ever known his own magic. As such, it was with only a feeling of wrongness that he approached the mail lying so innocently on the floor. He grabbed the letters, feeling them emanating the oddity; he flipped through them quickly, feeling with his magic until one pulsed under his hand. He let the others down where they had been and looked at the oddly formal letter in his hand with a mingling sense of hope and disbelief.

HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

*Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore
(Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorc., Chf. Warlock,
Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards)*

Dear Mr. Potter,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.

Term begins on 1 September. We await your owl by no later than 31 July.

Yours sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall

Harry's first instinct, to think this was some sort of cruel joke, was almost immediately discarded. It was too elaborate for any of the Dursleys to even think about, let alone actually invest time into carrying out, and who else did Harry know? Sandy wouldn't do something like this.

Besides, he'd been performing magic since he was 5, was it all that odd to suppose that a magical school for magical children existed? Harry thought it odd that it asked for an 'owl'. Was that slang for a response? Or maybe they literally did mean an owl? If the former, where was Harry supposed to address the letter to? *Hogwarts*? If the latter, where was Harry supposed to get an owl from? Would any owl do?

He brought the letter up to his room and read through it a few more times before deciding the that wisest course of action was to go to the post office and ask where the letter had been sent from; it had come through there, perhaps someone would know something about it.

He walked down the stairs as his uncle was also leaving. He didn't bother to tell him where he was going; they'd assume he was going to the library, as he often went there whenever he felt like go out. They didn't honestly care very much; Harry knew they would be ecstatic if one day he walked out of the house and never came back. The thought would have made him sad a few years back, but by now it was simply a fact of life and Harry had grown to appreciate the freedom it granted him. It didn't make him feel better, but he saw no point in attempting to change it. The Dursleys were a repugnant family anyways, and Harry would not have desired to be in their acquaintance at all had he a choice.

The walk to the post office took about an hour; Harry didn't mind, he liked walking, and it gave him time to think on the best approach to ask about the letter. He constantly shrouded himself with the spell "*Effugiat*", which effectively rendered him invisible in the eyes of passerby. He didn't want to be picked up by anyone, whether with good or bad intentions. When he reached the place Harry canceled the spell and walked up to one of the open help windows.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said to the woman behind the counter. She looked vaguely surprised at the boy in front of her, but smiled kindly.

"Yes, dear?"

"Do you think you could help me? I got this letter today, but I don't really know what to do with it." He passed her the Hogwarts letter. He'd already taken out the list of required equipment, just in case she kept the letter itself. She looked at it and grinned.

"Oh, it's another one of those," she said, sounding vaguely amused and vaguely frustrated. "Every few years we get a child with one of these, and none of them know anything about it. I'll pass you on to Fred, he always knows what to do." She then said something into a radio and a few moments later a large man with blonde hair and a wide smile came up to them.

"Hello, Amelia. This is the boy?" he said, peering at Harry. Harry smiled shyly at the man, feeling like he was being tested somehow.

"Yes. Here's the letter," Amelia said, passing the Hogwarts letter to Fred, who gave it a glance and nodded. He smiled at Harry.

"Don't worry, my boy. I'll send them their 'owl' for you." He winked, and Harry felt vaguely like he was being let on into an inside joke that he really didn't understand. He smiled anyways.

“Thank you, sir.”

Fred turned to leave when Harry suddenly realized that if anyone could help him get a foothold in this strange situation, this man was the only open gateway available to him. He had no other clues. He called out to the man.

“Sorry, sir? Can I ask you something?”

Fred turned back to Harry and, seeing that Harry was looking around nervously, gestured them into a corner of the room so they could speak more privately.

“The thing is,” Harry said, “that I don’t know where I could possibly get my materials for the school. They seem to assume in the letter that I know everything, but...”

Fred nodded, understanding. “That’s a problem with Hogwarts, definitely. They like to pretend they are very open to Muggles, but they don’t really make much of an effort.”

Harry frowned. So, apparently, Hogwarts was real. At least according to this man, who Harry frankly had no reason to trust; however, the situation was too perfect for Harry not to at least suspect a degree of veracity to the man’s statements, so he decided he’d treat the subject seriously unless it proved ridiculous to do so any longer. “What’s a Muggle?”

“It’s a person without magic. Like just about anyone here. Most Muggles have no idea magic exists, so communication between us is limited.”

Harry nodded. “That makes sense.” He then realized something about how the man was speaking. “Sir, are you a...?”

“Wizard?” Fred shook his head. “Not exactly. I’m what you would call a Squib; born from a wizarding family but without magic.”

Harry nodded, trying not to let his expression show how sorry he felt for the man. “Sir, do you know where I could buy my books?” he softly reminded him of his original question.

“Oh, yes of course.” Fred nodded, procuring a piece of paper from his pocket and then writing something down on it. He passed it to Harry, who looked at the address written down.

“That’s the Leaky Cauldron. It’s the closest place to here from where you can get into Diagon Alley. You can find all you need there.” He rubbed his beard thoughtfully. “I’d recommend going with one of your parents to Gringotts first. Sometimes Muggleborns are given a loan by the school, but you’d have to check it out. It’s our bank, a great white building in the middle of Diagon Alley, you really can’t miss it.”

Harry nodded, thankfully. He felt no need to tell the man that he had no parents and that he would be going alone. He wondered if he had a loan; he better have, given that the Dursleys would never lend him enough to pay for what he supposed must be the cost of the schooling. He didn’t recognize the term ‘Muggleborn’, but from the context he assumed he meant a wizard born from two Muggles.

“When you get to the Leaky Cauldron,” Fred continued. “Speak to Tom, he’s the bartender. Tell him you want to go into Diagon Alley, he’ll open up the portal for you. From there you can explore everything and when you need to get back, just ask anyone for the Cauldron and they’ll help you.”

Harry smiled. “Thank you very much, sir.”

Fred clapped his shoulder before standing up. “No problem, lad. Congratulations on being accepted!”

Harry thanked him again and walked out of the post office, practically vibrating with energy and anticipation. He couldn’t wait to go to Diagon Alley and witness this world where there were other people like him, other people who could speak Latin and who could change their words into actions through their magic. It would be so beautiful.

A few days later, Harry walked out of the house with a backpack and a few hundred pounds in his pocket which he’d over the last months managed to earn through selling a few of the things he’d made. He’d tried to make money directly, but had never succeeded in making it in such a way that it actually looked and felt like real money. He could make coins, but each one took too much of an effort for what they were each worth, so he’d eventually decided to try making money in a less direct way.

There was a shop about half an hour away which he’d approached because it looked seedy enough not to ask too many questions about a child bringing in various silver knickknacks; he’d told the owner that he’d found the various bracelets and necklaces in a garbage can near his house and wanted to sell them because, frankly, he had no need for the jewelry.

The owner had at first not wanted anything to do with it; he’d obviously assumed Harry had stolen them from somewhere, which was a perfectly valid assumption given the strangeness of a small child with so much silver. After a month of Harry insisting, and no one reporting any robberies of such silver objects, the owner reluctantly accepted the jewelry after making sure that it was indeed silver. Harry knew the amount of money he’d gotten was about half what the man would sell it for, but he didn’t particularly mind; he himself hadn’t paid anything for them, after all, and he wasn’t going to use them for anything anyways. He hadn’t gone back to the shop, not wanting to give the owner any excuse to suspect that the findings had been anything other than luck, but kept it as a backup idea in case he ever needed money again.

Finding the Leaky Cauldron was relatively easy, if an odd experience for Harry. He took a cab to Charring Cross Road, the address Fred had given him. As he stepped out in front of what appeared to be a shady pub, he noted with curiosity that no one in the street seemed to notice the place. Their eyes would move oddly from the shop to the right of the Cauldron to that of the left, without pausing in between. Harry realized that someone must have spelled the place so that it would be invisible to Muggles; he supposed it would not do to have them going in at all times to a magical place, as he’d gotten the impression that magic was a very hush-hush subject from the man in the post and from the fact that he’d never heard anything about it. He supposed spotting a dragon running loose through a park might raise a few eyebrows.

He entered through the door and took a look around the pub. There was not a large amount of people, but it was not empty either. Harry felt a tingle run through his skin and he knew, although not how, that it was his magic reacting to the magic surrounding him. He wondered if it was due to the fact that all the people around him were also wizards, or if the pub itself was magical. He wondered how he would tell, if it was possible. Perhaps people felt different than objects? The only other magical thing he’d come into contact with was the Hogwarts letter, and that had been more of a strange wrongness rather than an actual feeling. Was this place’s magic stronger? Were people more poignant? Did different people feel differently? He looked around and spotted a man standing behind the bar. He approached quietly, dodging around various tables and chairs.

“Sir?”

The man had been washing a glass, and as he spoke the man looked up and smiled kindly.

“Hello, young man. How can I help you?”

“Please, sir, I’m looking for Tom?”

The man nodded. “That’s me. What can I do for you?”

Harry smiled, hoisting the bag higher onto his shoulder. “Could you please open the gateway to Diagon Alley for me?”

“Of course, lad,” Tom said, placing the glass down and then retrieving a long, thin piece of wood from behind the counter. Harry looked on curiously, as he was lead towards the back of the establishment towards a blank wall. Tom placed the wood against the rock and for a moment Harry wondered if he would turn it into a key, but Tom tapped a few bricks in a counter-clockwise order and suddenly the bricks shifted. A doorway was soon formed, and through it Harry could see many people walking down a street in various odd dress styles. He hid his surprise and smiled to Tom, thanking him before walking into what he supposed was Diagon Alley.

The place was exquisite. Harry walked down a wide pathway littered with small pebbles and surrounded with all manner of shops; owls, cauldrons, books, clothes, food and many more things which Harry could not identify but immediately wanted to know more about. His magic was thrumming under his skin pleasantly. The people surrounding him were no less interesting than the place itself; various men and women, even a few children, walked about clothed in what Harry could only call robes. He saw a couple wearing pointed hats, but altogether it seemed to be a dying fad. He also noticed a few more people who were carrying sticks similar to Tom’s, and came to the conclusion that they must be wands; perhaps they helped wizards cast complicated spells? Or maybe it was simply a fashion accessory?

Everyone seemed to know where they were going and what they were doing, and no one paid Harry much mind, although a few glanced at his clearly Muggle clothing and backpack. Harry murmured “*Effugiat*” and placed ‘getting proper clothes’ as the first thing to do if he wanted to remain inconspicuous. He wondered how much clothes cost, hoping fervently that there was at least a cheap cloth he could afford. He was drawn immediately towards the bookshop, but refrained from entering as he remembered Fred’s advice about going first to the bank, Gringotts, and kept walking forwards to the large building he could see in at the end of the street. The closer he got, the larger it looked, until he was standing at the edge of the staircase and craning his neck to see the top. He cancelled the cloaking spell, noting that upon the large entrance were the words, *Gringotts*.

He entered the large brass doors which was flanked by two guards which Harry, after looking at them curiously for a moment realized were not just two really ugly, short people, but what he supposed must be *goblins*. He masked his nervousness and vague awe at these creatures which he’d only read about in books, thinking that he would probably be faced with even stranger creatures soon and besides no other wizard seemed surprised to see them there. He walked down a short pathway before coming upon another set of doors, silver this time, upon which an inscription read;

*Enter, stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed
For those who take, but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn.
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware*

Of finding more than treasure there.

Harry had to suppress a shiver as he was suddenly assaulted by an unsettling sensation of being about to pass through the doors to the entrance of Hell, but he pushed the feeling back with a reprimand to himself about unfounded superstition.

He opened the door and was faced with two large rows of goblins seated high on marble desks. He hesitated for a moment, wondering if he needed to wait to be called upon or if there was any sign of who he was supposed to speak to first. After a moment of indecision, he approached one of the ones which had no one in front of them, although they seemed busy counting coins. He noted the coins were not pounds, and wondered suddenly if wizards had their own currency. The thought had not occurred to him before, and he hoped that he could at least exchange the pounds he'd brought.

"Excuse me, sir," he said to the goblin as politely as he could. "I'm a new student going to Hogwarts, and would like to know if I have been given a loan."

The goblin did not acknowledge him for a moment, and Harry hoped he hadn't inadvertently offended him. Then the goblin turned towards him. For a moment it seemed like he didn't see Harry at all, before his eyes suddenly fixed on Harry's and he smiled faintly.

"Mr. Potter. What a pleasure to finally see you," he said, his voice gravelly and low. It fit the strange creature, somehow. Harry nodded, wondering how on earth the goblin knew his name. Perhaps they had a spell on the door which told the teller who had come in? Before he could say anything, the goblin continued. "You have not been given a loan, Mr. Potter."

Harry frowned. That did not sound good. "How may I apply for one?" he asked.

The goblin shifted. "You do not apply for a loan, Mr. Potter. The school provides one automatically if they see you need one."

Harry noted that the goblin seemed amused at the idea of Harry needing a loan. "How do they know if I...never mind, magic obviously," he muttered, and the goblin seemed even more amused. His face didn't shift much, but Harry got the distinct feeling of laughter coming from the creature. "If the school doesn't think I need a loan, then that means I have money, yes?" The goblin nodded. "How do I have money?"

"The bank stores all your valuables and assets, but you may remove and make use of them as you see fit, which makes them in essence your possessions," the goblin responded. Harry blinked. That answer, while probably perfectly truthful, had been utterly useless. He was sure the goblin was playing with him, but he felt no hostility from the creature and had no other option; besides, he did not particularly mind talking to the goblin.

"Why do I have the money?"

"You inherited it from your parents when they died."

Harry gripped his backpack tightly. "They were rich, then. Where did they come about all this money? Did they earn it themselves?"

The goblin smiled toothily. "Some of it, yes, but most of it comes from generations upon generations of family members inheriting fortunes and then dying. You are a very wealthy wizard, Mr. Potter."

Harry swallowed thickly. Clearly the Dursleys had never heard of this great fortune he supposedly had; he was sure he would be by now destitute and they living in a mansion. "Are the Potters well

known, then?"

"Very much so, Mr. Potter. Especially you, of course." The goblin's smile turned slightly toothy and Harry had to fight the instinct to take a step back. He frowned.

"Me? Why am I famous?"

The goblin's smile dimmed but his amusement did not falter. "Unfortunately, Mr. Potter, I am not the one to tell you that. You may look it up in any one of those history book you wizards love so much." Harry wanted to press the matter, but the goblin suddenly leaned forwards, crossing his hands and speaking in a more serious manner. "Now, you have three vaults; one in which the family's valuables are kept, one in which the cash is kept and the last one, your trust fund. At the moment you may only access the trust fund, but upon your coming of age at 16, as the head of the Potter line, you will gain full access to all the vaults. Would you like to visit your vault?"

The ride down to the vault was at once terrifying and exhilarating for Harry; terrifying because he often felt he was about to fly off, exhilarating because he was sure he could save himself from death with a well-timed spell if needed. Besides, the cart seemed spelled so that one couldn't fall off, even if they jumped. After what felt like long while, the rusty cart finally came to a stop in front of a large set of brass doors and the goblin stepped out. He looked back at Harry and gestured forwards. Harry climbed out and stood in front of the doors.

"What do I do?"

"Simply press your hand against the door and it will grant you access."

Harry did, and the door suddenly seemed to turn liquid, fading quickly into the seams of the entrance to what appeared to be a massive cave filled to the brim with gold. Harry couldn't help looking around in awe; all this belonged to him? And this was a *trust fund*? He turned to the goblin, still looking and feeling gobsmacked. "How much gold is there in here? And in the family vault?"

"In this particular vault there are currently 550 000 galleons. Each year you are transferred 50 000 galleons from the family vault. In the family vault there are currently 239 810 995 Galleons, 12 Sickles and 23 Knuts."

Harry swallowed heavily. He was...rich didn't cover what he was. "I take it Galleons, Sickles and Knuts are wizard currency? Which one is which? What's the exchange rate? And why are there so many Galleons in comparison to the other coins?" He hoped he wasn't asking so many questions that the goblin would grow annoyed and tell him to shut up and just take the money, but the goblin just crossed his arms behind his back. Harry wasn't sure why the goblin was suddenly being so forthcoming with information, but decided not to question it. He felt like he'd passed some sort of test.

"All coins deposited are automatically exchanged into the largest possible coin. Galleons are the gold ones, Sickles silver and Knuts copper. There are 17 Sickles to a Galleon and 29 Knuts to a Sickle," he said.

Harry thought the exchange rate odd, but didn't question what must by now be reasoning lost to the eons. He was suddenly struck by the thought that he'd only brought a small backpack with him for his trip; he had seen a shop back in the Alley that sold trunks, but the coins looked heavy and he didn't want to have to come back just yet. He brought the backpack in front of him.

"*Dilatet*," he said, and fed the bag enough magic that it grew to twice its previous size. It still

wasn't very large, but Harry didn't want to be seen lugging a huge bag around either. "*Ponderemus quasi oxygeni*," he then said, and felt the bag's weight suddenly decrease until he could barely feel it in his hand. He'd learnt his lesson about making things weight nothing, or 'like a feather'. The former had the rock he'd been experimenting on shooting upwards as it 'floated' up in the air; Harry had been terrified that if he'd let it go it would kill someone in its decent, but eventually managed to get it down gently. The latter, well; he'd learnt about how feathers were actually not light at all, simply very good at dealing with air friction. Eventually, he'd come up with the idea of using the elements. He knew air was mostly nitrogen, and as oxygen was very slightly denser than nitrogen, it sank slowly. Therefore, making his bag as light as oxygen meant he could still carry it around without fear that it would levitate off his shoulders. The spell would also cover anything inside the bag, as Harry had channeled his magic into an area which surrounded and in essence 'clung' to the bag, rather than into the bag itself; otherwise there would be no point to the spell.

He turned to the goblin to ask if there was a limit to the amount of coins he could retrieve, and maybe how much things cost on average, only to find the goblin had retreated to the cart and was pressed against its side, staring at him with a strange mixture of awe and fear on his face. Harry froze, and they both stood at a standstill for a few minutes until the goblin finally seemed to compose himself.

"How...how did you do that?" he said, his voice shaky and quiet. Harry looked at him curiously, if warily.

"I...cast a spell? What?" He had no idea why the goblin had reacted as he had. He was a goblin who lived with wizards, so clearly being able to do magic wasn't the problem. Had he never heard of the spell? Was casting magic in public somehow taboo? Were people his age not supposed to do it?

"Where's your wand? What spell is that?"

Harry frowned. Perhaps wands were more important than he'd realized. And what did the goblin mean, 'what was that spell'? It was just Latin. "I haven't got a wand yet; I sometimes do magic without it, although I'm not sure how," he said slowly, trying to diffuse the event's importance. He didn't add that he didn't need a wand and never had. He got the feeling that the goblin would not react well. "And I've known that spell for a few years, I don't know where I know it from originally." Both answers were the truth and yet, as the goblin had done before him, relatively useless. Harry was suddenly perfectly certain that his magical ability was not, in some way, normal, and so decided to refrain from performing magic until he was better aware of why the goblin had reacted like that.

The goblin was tense for a few more moments before seeming to come to a decision. "That was a most...surprising display of magic. Forgive my reaction, I was not expecting it." He seemed now to have gotten over his fear, but remained near the cart. There was silence for a few moments, and Harry turned back to the coins, uncomfortable.

"How many can I take out? And, if you don't mind, could you tell me how much a trunk costs? And the average Hogwarts supplies?"

The goblin cleared his throat, once again crossing his arms behind his back. "You may take out as much as you like; the vault is fully yours. The cost for a trunk may range from 5 sickles to 20 000 galleons, depending on your needs and specifications, but on average they come to around 50 galleons. The average Hogwarts supplies are around 10 galleons, although if you want high quality materials it may cost up to 100 or more."

Harry nodded his thanks at the information, then turned back to the vault. He quickly realized that

the coins near the door were stacked in piles of 100 galleons, and scooped up 1000 into his bag. They fit nicely and Harry barely noticed their weight as he hoisted up the bag onto his shoulder. Then he turned back to the goblin.

“Excuse me, may I know your name? For when I return?” he asked. He’d liked the goblin, overall; he had been exceedingly helpful and relatively good natured, and apart from the magic incident felt that they had gotten along relatively well.

The goblin tensed again and Harry was struck by the thought that it might be considered horribly rude to ask the goblin for his name. However, the goblin then relaxed and smiled faintly once again.

“I am Gornuk, Mr. Potter. You may ask for me when you return, and I will be glad to help you.”

Harry nodded his thanks, and they then took the cart back up to the bank’s main floor. Once there, Harry once again turned to Gornuk.

“Before I leave,” he said. “Do you know where I could stay for the night? Somewhere that doesn’t stand out and isn’t too expensive.”

Gornuk seemed once again amused at Harry’s expense, but Harry was grateful that he hadn’t been further questioned on his magic and could take being mocked lightly.

“There are various places around the Alley, but the closest is the Leaky Cauldron. You will have passed through it to get here; it has a good reputation and is quite cheap,” Gornuk said, taking out a pouch of coins and then beginning to count them.

Harry nodded. “Thank you, Gornuk. It was very nice meeting you. I will return soon to talk more about my vaults and family assets; I hope you can help me with that as well.”

Gornuk gave him another toothy smile, although Harry had by now grown accustomed to it and merely returned it.

Harry left the bank, unaware of the calculating gaze that followed him out the door. He stood on the steps outside with his bag full of gold and looked around at the vast multitudes of shops which surrounded him. At least he didn’t have to worry about a curfew.

“Well now, where to start?”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading <3

Amicus

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

After a few moments of deliberation, Harry decided to begin his foray into the wizarding world by beginning with the acquisition of a robe. He didn't want to call any more attention to himself than absolutely necessary, and his current Muggle clothes made him stand out. He decided that he would immediately afterwards go to a book shop and find out just why Gornuk thought he was famous. No one else had reacted in a strange manner upon seeing him, and he hadn't seen any mention of himself or his family on any posters or the newspapers he'd passed, although he decided he'd better buy one and look over it more carefully. This at once calmed him and set him on edge; he was glad not to have been mobbed as he'd seen famous people be in the Dursley's TV, but that made him wonder what *kind* of a famous person he was. What was he even famous for? He didn't remember ever doing anything particularly worthy of publicity. Did the people walking around him simply not care about what he'd done? Did they not recognize him, or not know what he looked like?

He also wanted to begin to read about all things available to wizards; he suspected the books identified in his Hogwarts letter were but a tiny fraction of the amount of subjects he could delve into. His palms itched with his desire to hold a book and get sucked in for hours on end. Nothing else felt like it. Magic came close, but for Harry the true grace came from the challenge of figuring out how to use Latin so that his magic would respond as he wished. Certainly, the feeling of magic rushing through his body, pulsing through his veins whenever he sought it was one he could not imagine himself living without, now that he knew what it felt like. But books were above even that.

He approached a shop which had an inscription above its entrance which read '*Madame Malkin's Robes for all Occasions*', and which behind a pane of glass Harry could see a variety of robes which looked like those of the wizards walking around the Alley. As soon as he walked in he noticed a short, plump woman who was helping a blonde boy who looked to be about Harry's age try on his robes. She held a wand and was waving it about the boy's robes in a hurried, practiced manner. She immediately noticed Harry, who was standing awkwardly by the door.

"Don't just stand there, dear. Hogwarts, I take it? I'm Madam Malkin. Please stand on this footstool over here; I'll be with you in a jiffy."

Harry hurried to obey her, coming over to stand on the footstool next to the pair. The witch came over to stand in front of him, as the blonde boy looked his way curiously. A second witch emerged from a door near the back and took over with the other boy where Madame Malkin had left off.

"We have the standard set of Hogwarts robes, of course. I'll get you fitted right up." She threw a robe over his shoulders and immediately set about adjusting it for him.

"Hello," the blonde boy suddenly said, and Harry turned to look at him. "Hogwarts, too?"

Harry nodded. He'd never been good at speaking to children his own age; he never knew how to act, and couldn't relate to how they seemed to expect him to. This boy seemed rather more composed, however, than the average 11-year-old Harry knew of; he also looked rather more arrogant.

"My father's next door buying my books and mother is up the street looking at wands," he continued. He seemed to be about to speak further but what he'd said caught Harry's attention.

“She’s looking at wands? Where?” He’d seen the bookshop he supposed the boy was talking about, one which had an engraving on the top which read *Flourish and Blotts*, but he hadn’t seen any wands shops as he’d been walking round the Alley. The blonde boy didn’t seem to find the question odd, which Harry was grateful for, but he looked to be slightly annoyed at the interruption.

“Ollivander’s, of course. He’s the best there is, and we Malfoys have only the best.”

Harry wondered for a moment what on earth a Malfoy was, before realizing it was probably the boy’s family’s name. From the way he’d said it, he seemed to assume that Harry already knew this, so Harry didn’t ask him about it.

“Of course, Ollivander’s. I’ll have to go there myself, too,” he told the boy. The blonde nodded with approval at his agreement, if with little interest.

“Do you know what House you’ll be in at Hogwarts yet?”

Harry felt himself freeze at the question. He had no idea what Houses were, although he guessed from the boy’s phrasing that it was some sort of group within Hogwarts. The letter hadn’t mentioned anything about Houses; should Harry already know which one he would go into? How did one go about choosing what House they went into? Did they even have a choice? Did it have anything to do with intelligence? Lineage? Eye color? Shoe size?

“I’m not sure yet,” he responded cautiously. The boy nodded and Harry felt himself relax minutely. Another question avoided.

“Well, of course. No one *knows* until they get there,” the blonde acquiesced. “I’m certain I’ll be in Slytherin, though; all my family have been in it, after all,” he answered haughtily, and Harry noted that family was apparently important in the decision.

This wasn’t of much help to him, obviously; he still hadn’t had a chance to read up on his family history, although after his talk with Gornuk he knew that it was something he’d have to do as soon as possible. The knowledge that his parents – or at least, his father – were wizards, as he was, was at once strangely unsurprising and unsettling. It was possible that the Dursleys had never found out that Harry’s parents knew about magic, but Harry was suspicious of it. They had reacted strangely well to Harry’s own ability for magic, and although at the time Harry hadn’t questioned it, over the years he’d come to realize that it was not normal for the Dursleys to accept his magic so easily. Sandy was a different matter; she seemed to be wrapped up in a belief that Harry’s magic was a blessing from heaven, and she would never do anything to bring him to harm. The Dursleys were under no such compunctions; the idea that they were already familiar with magic from Harry’s parents made their behavior much more understandable. Harry even understood why they’d never told him anything about it; they probably wanted absolutely nothing to do with magic whatsoever, and it wasn’t like they were about to do Harry any favours.

“Imagine being in Hufflepuff; I think I’d leave, wouldn’t you?” the boy said, turning sideways so the woman could start up on his side. “I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn’t be too bad, since they are known for their love for books. Gryffindor would be the absolute worst, of course, although there’s no way I’d end up there.” The boy’s expression was twisted up in mild disgust, as if Gryffindor was a particularly repugnant bug he’d found on the sole of his shoe.

“Maybe I’ll be in Ravenclaw,” Harry said, encouraged by the boy’s approval of the house’s alleged quality and eagerly grasping at the first wisp of a familiar subject. “I’ve read quite a bit, myself. I really enjoy all sorts books.”

“Really?” the blonde said, looking at Harry as if for the first time thinking he might actually be somewhat interesting as opposed to being someone with whom to occupy his time. Harry got the impression the boy was used to people agreeing with him mindlessly. From his appearance, Harry suspected he was rich and so was used to people approaching him only for money; Harry had read about those sorts of people often enough in his texts on ancient emperors and rulers. He’d never had the chance to suffer through it himself, although he supposed now he might get to. “Well, I enjoy reading as well, and my family’s library is immense. We have the largest collection of books in England, you see, except perhaps for the Hogwarts library.”

Harry’s eyes widened at the boy’s words. “Really? Wow! That’s absolutely fantastic,” he said, smiling. The other boy seemed surprised at his sudden enthusiasm before grinning.

“It really is quite astounding.” He seemed about to continue but then the door opened and a beautiful woman stepped in the shop. She had blonde hair which fell around her shoulders elegantly, and eyes a glittering, light blue, and she was dressed in dark emerald robes which Harry could only fathom cost a fortune. The boy immediately turned towards her.

“Mother! Did you find me a wand?”

The woman smiled serenely. “Draco, you know you need to go to Ollivander’s yourself to find your wand. I can’t bring one for you.”

Draco flushed slightly, nodding, before suddenly seeming to remember Harry was there. “Mother, this is...Oh, I’m sorry, I forgot to ask for your name,” he said. Harry hesitated for a moment, but came to the conclusion that since they would both be going to Hogwarts together he’d find out sooner or later anyways.

“Harry Potter.”

Draco’s face went pale at an alarming rate, and Harry feared that the boy would faint. Before the boy could recover his bearings, the woman was suddenly right next to Harry, peering at him in a way that he found slightly disconcerting.

“Are you really?” she asked, her voice holding only a polite note of curiosity, but Harry could see her sharp eyes scrutinizing him for any falsehood. Her magic was whipping about her, suddenly rather more agitated than it had been, and Harry wondered if it had been such a good idea to reveal who he was after all.

“You’re Harry Potter?” Draco suddenly blurted, before flushing red under his mother’s disapproving glance. “I mean...why didn’t you say anything?”

“I assumed you knew and that was why you hadn’t asked before. I’m sorry for the misunderstanding,” Harry said, preferring to seem slightly arrogant than to reveal his ignorance over whatever it was he was famous for. It didn’t seem like either of them would take such a thing lightly. Madam Malkin had stopped her bustling for a moment upon his revelation, but now continued as if nothing had happened; Harry appreciated her professionalism. Draco flushed even further.

“I...I mean...that...”

“What he means to say, dear, is that he usually has much better manners,” Draco’s mother cut in adroitly. Harry turned back to her; her scrutinizing gaze was gone, replaced instead with a gracious smile. Apparently she really did believe he was who he claimed, although how she’d come to the conclusion Harry wished he could find out. “My name is Narcissa Malfoy. I’m sorry for my son’s

rudeness. I assume you are going to Hogwarts this term as well?"

Harry smiled politely. "Not at all, Mrs. Malfoy. He's been perfectly charming. And yes, I'm going to Hogwarts this term with him. We were just discussing the Houses."

Her smile turned slightly more warm at this, and Harry felt like he'd passed some sort of test.

"Have you gotten your wand yet? We were about to set out to Ollivander's as soon as my husband arrives."

Harry considered the proposition before nodding. The Malfoys seemed like a powerful family and, although Harry was not exactly planning his way into power, it probably wouldn't hurt to have friends in high places. He was already famous anyways, and his family was clearly powerful in their own right, so his original plan of sticking to the shadows would clearly not work out quite as he'd hoped. Besides, Draco seemed like someone Harry could get along with, and he wasn't sure how many of those people he'd find at Hogwarts.

"I have yet to get my wand, and was planning on heading in that direction as well," he said, careful to allow Narcissa to be the one to make the offer openly. She seemed aware of his actions, but seemed also to approve of his manners.

"Well then, if you don't mind, you could accompany us. I'm sure my husband would love to meet you, and Draco would appreciate having you along," she said graciously, and Draco nodded, having gotten his flush under control and his bearings back. Harry smiled politely. The more he talked to Narcissa, the more he felt like he was living inside some of the books he'd read about medieval times, when royalty ruled autocratically and everyone who was anyone lived and breathed the Royal Courts. Narcissa certainly looked and behaved like a Lady from those times, and Harry felt the need to respond accordingly.

"I would be honored, Mrs. Malfoy."

Madam Malkin suddenly straightened and gave Harry a once over. "Well, there you are. That will be 1 galleon for the robes, although if you want the full uniform that will be 3 galleons."

"You should probably get two sets and a winter coat," Draco said suddenly. He no longer sounded as haughty as he had before; rather, he seemed to be much open and relaxed towards Harry. "I've heard it can get pretty cold at Hogwarts, and you never know when an accident might destroy one of your robes irreparably."

For a moment, Harry considered the boy's sudden change in personality, then nodded his thanks and passed the order on to Madam Malkin. She immediately scurried off to bundle his purchases. A moment later the woman who was attending to Draco was also finished; Draco made the same order to her as he'd advised Harry to make and she hurried away.

It made sense that the blonde would treat Harry as an equal if he thought they were of equal social standing; his family clearly belonged to high society, if his mother was any indication, and Draco would probably have been brought up with a very specific idea of who he should socialize with. Harry was now within that category, and he was famous, besides; of course Draco would now feel more comfortable speaking to him as a friend rather than someone with whom his family would disapprove of his acquaintance. Harry didn't blame him.

Besides, the suggestion was sound; although Harry was relatively certain that, if the need came up, he would be able to either repair or make another robe on his own, he still wasn't sure what limitations he might need to pretend towards his own magic. It would be best to have two sets, just

in case.

“So Harry, dear, how are feeling about attending Hogwarts?” Narcissa asked as they waited for their purchases near the desk.

“Quite excited. I’m really looking forwards to all the subjects; I’ve heard the library is amazing as well, and I can’t wait to see what it looks like,” he said. He didn’t mention he’d heard this from Draco only a few moments ago. She nodded.

“It is quite impressive indeed. Our own library can only hope to compare, even though it is magnificent in its own right. Hogwarts possesses many books we could only hope of purchasing elsewhere. It is quite pleasant to see someone so young taking an interest,” she said. “Is there any subject you are particularly interested in?”

Harry shook his head. “I’m afraid I don’t know enough about them to properly have a preference yet. Perhaps next year I will have a more coherent response.”

Narcissa smiled. “Very sensible answer, Harry,” she said, seemingly pleased.

“I’m excited for Potions. Severus Snape is my Godfather, you see,” Draco said, smiling slightly. Now that he didn’t appear as arrogant, Harry really thought he might grow to genuinely like Draco. The blonde’s haughty attitude would prevent too many people from trying to become his friend, which Harry appreciated due to his anti-social nature. Besides, the blonde liked to read, and that was almost always an automatic way to gain Harry’s approval.

“That’s great. Potions sounds interesting,” Harry said, wondering who on earth Severus Snape was. He supposed he was their Potions teacher, although he wondered how Draco knew who would teach them. Maybe his Godfather had told him? How many teachers were there?

“It really is. I’ve read a lot about it, and I’ve been practicing with him so I can improve my skills. Have you ever made a potion?”

Harry smiled nervously. “Never had a chance, but I’m looking forward to it. Is it very hard?”

“It’s not really, if you pay attention, although actually being good at Potions takes more than just the ability to read instructions. Uncle Snape was teaching me how...Father, you’re back.” Draco suddenly cut himself off, turning to look at a blonde man who had walked into the shop.

The man was as strikingly attractive as Narcissa Malfoy, with hair a blonde so light it was almost white and a countenance that spoke of nobility. He looked like Harry could imagine Draco might as he grew older, although Draco’s features were slightly softened by his mother’s genes. However, it was the man’s magic that really made him stand out to Harry; his magic was unlike any other Harry had felt up until now. It was carefully controlled and yet felt icily vicious, and if Harry had to choose an animal to describe it he’d pick a blank mamba. It swarmed under the man’s skin, coiled and ready to strike. Harry felt a shiver run down his spine at the obvious power.

Draco’s father’s grey eyes surveyed the shop before they suddenly landed on Harry, narrowing as he registered the unknown boy talking with his wife and son so naturally. His magic pulsed dangerously. Draco, sensing the atmosphere, immediately intervened.

“Father, this is Harry Potter. Harry, this is my father, Lucius Malfoy. Father, I just met Harry as he was trying on his robes and we thought he could come with us for his wand at Ollivander’s.”

Harry watched as Lucius absorbed the information before once again regarding Harry. His expression had gone from frosty to cordial, although Harry still had the feeling of being regarded as

beneath the man. His magic was suddenly exceedingly still.

“Mr. Potter,” he said, softly. “What a pleasure to finally meet you.” Something in his tone gave Harry the feeling that the sentiment was not entirely felt.

Harry bowed slightly. “Likewise, Sir,” he said, turning slightly towards Narcissa. He preferred to defer to her, with whom he’d already established a reasonably amicable relationship. She seemed to pick up on his hesitance and nervousness and smiled calmly at her husband.

“Harry has agreed to accompany us as soon as Madam Malkin has our robes ready,” she said. Something seemed to pass between the married couple, before Lucius nodded. His magic ceased its unnatural stillness and now once again ran through his skin, although the man’s expression did not change. Harry breathed out slowly.

“Very well. I hope that will not take too long?”

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than Madam Malkin returned with two small bundles in her arms. For a moment Harry wondered if there had been some mistake before realizing that she had probably spelled the clothes smaller so that they would be easier to carry. Harry took one and Draco the other; Harry placed his inside his bag, grateful he’d thought of enlarging it or else after the coins nothing else would have fit. He noted that it might be a good idea to buy a trunk before going to the bookstore. He took out 9 galleons and paid Madam Malkin as Narcissa reached into her purse to do the same, and they then walked out of the shop together.

Harry quickly noted how everyone looked their way as they walked down Diagon Alley, talking about Hogwarts and what they should be looking forwards to in the coming year. He wasn’t surprised; the Malfoys were a stunning family, and they seemed to be well known. Few people seemed to notice Harry, but if they did they gave him curious looks, as if asking themselves why the Malfoys would be around him, who he could possibly be. He was certainly more noticeably than he preferred being, and it made him regret for a moment accepting Narcissa’s suggestion, but he actually was enjoying being around the Malfoys. After talking for a while, Lucius seemed to warm to Harry slightly, especially after they had begun discussing his love for books. The man had even insinuated that perhaps Harry might at some point like to visit their home, Malfoy Manor, to peruse their library, an offer which Harry fully intended to take advantage of if the opportunity presented itself. All three of them shared an appreciation for knowledge that Harry was extremely grateful for, even if it was clear that it wasn’t as deeply entrenched as Harry’s own.

Narcissa seemed interested mostly in books for their entertainment value; she was certainly intelligent, but seemed to have guided her intellect largely into social matters. Draco was more practical; he enjoyed reading on potions and dueling because he could apply what he’d learned on actual, physical tests. It wasn’t that he was bad at theory, but it clearly wasn’t something he enjoyed as much. Lucius didn’t say much about himself, but Harry got the impression he was primarily a politician. By the time they arrived at Ollivander’s, he had managed to engage Lucius in a conversation about what the ideal form of government could be, with Draco intervening every once in a while with a question or opinion. They were forced to stop mid-way through a discussion on the merits and failings of parliamentary democracy as Narcissa carefully interrupted them to enter the shop.

A small bell rang somewhere in the back of the shop as the group stepped inside. It was an odd shop, dusty, misty and covered floor to ceiling with small, long boxes, and Harry felt oddly like the Malfoys did not fit in the place. Suddenly, from the depths of the shop, an old man seemed to appear. His eyes were wide and silvery and Harry could not feel his magic at all. It made him oddly nauseous.

"Good afternoon," the old man said softly, coming to stand in front of the group. His milky eyes suddenly centered on Harry, who fought the urge to squirm uncomfortably.

"I thought I'd be seeing you soon. Harry Potter." It wasn't a question. "You have your mother's eyes. It seems only yesterday she was in here herself, buying her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches long, swishy, made of willow. Nice wand for charm work." The old man moved closer to Harry.

"Your father, on the other hand, favored a mahogany wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father favored it – it's really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course." He paused for a moment. "And that's where..." He reached out with a long finger towards Harry's forehead, coming to rest lightly upon a white, ragged scar which Harry had never before paid any attention to.

With an inexplicable realization that felt more like a brutal slap, Harry was suddenly perfectly certain that this scar was the brand of his fame. He took an unsteady step backwards, needing to put space between the man and himself. There was a moment of silence before Lucius took a step forwards, placing himself between Harry and the old man. Draco came up next to Harry, looking slightly worried at his vacant and pale face.

"Mr. Ollivander, as I'm sure you've figured out, we'd like to purchase some wands. If you would oblige us?" His face seemed congenial, his tone deceptively calm, but Harry could see Lucius' magic fluttering nervously. He didn't seem to feel any more comfortable in front of Ollivander than Harry did, though Harry noticed that neither Narcissa's nor Draco's magic seemed to be reacting nervously. Perhaps it was only those who were more sensitive to magic, who were more in touch with it, who could feel Ollivander's unsettling lack? Harry wanted to ask Lucius if he too could detect magic, but wasn't sure he dared just yet. The man had appeared to almost like Harry, but he was under no illusions that the man wouldn't regress back to frosty politeness if he found Harry lacking in any way.

Ollivander nodded, taking a step back. "Yes, of course. Well, Mr. Potter, which is your wand arm?"

Harry shook his head to dispel the feeling of queasiness, although it was not particularly effective. "I'm right-handed, Sir."

"Come over here and hold out your arm, that's it," Ollivander said. Harry approached Ollivander as he took out a tape measure and began measuring his arm, then his shoulder, his neck and head. None of the Malfoys seemed to find this odd, so Harry didn't question the strange event although he felt slightly ridiculous. Eventually, Ollivander stepped back once again and began perusing through the boxes of wands. He took one out and handed it to Harry.

"Beechwood and dragon heartstring. Nine inches. Nice and flexible. Just take it and give it a wave."

Harry grasped the wand in his hand and immediately felt its unpleasantness. His magic seemed to recoil away from the wood, as if actively fighting his grip.

"No. This isn't the wand," he said, hurriedly giving it back to Ollivander before his magic became even more unsettled. He shook his hand to get rid of the odd feeling. Ollivander watched him curiously before peering into his eyes.

"A magic sensitive," he said softly, so softly that Harry barely heard and he was sure the Malfoys had not. "How amazing that you, Mr. Potter, would turn out to be one." He turned back to the huge

wall of boxes, and then gestured Harry over, who gingerly joined him. Closer now to the boxes, he could feel them all humming quietly, a flicker of magic here and there which ticked his own oddly. He shivered.

“Now, Mr. Potter. This is an unusual circumstance. You can feel the wands, yes?” Harry nodded, feeling it would do no good to pretend otherwise. “Very well, then. Feel free to choose that which feels right for you. I will go attend to Mr. Malfoy. Call me if anything appears to work.” He then walked over to Draco and once again began the process of measuring everything in his body that could be measured. Harry looked over to Narcissa and Lucius; they were looking at him curiously, wondering why he’d been left alone with the wands, although Lucius was giving him a calculating look. Harry turned back to the wands, wishing to deal with problems one at a time. He closed his eyes.

For a moment, his senses were overloaded with the sheer quantity of wands which surrounded him; however, after a few seconds, his magic began to tune into a few more strongly than others and began to pull him in their direction. Harry opened his eyes and, following the pull of his magic, pulled out 4 boxes of wands.

The first one was a dark brown color and had magic which seemed to tingle pleasantly with his own, but as soon as he touched it the feeling became impossibly uncomfortable and he was forced to place the wand back in its place.

The second wand was fully black, longer than the first one, and when Harry picked it up he at first felt nothing, his magic seemingly not noticing the wand. After a few moments though, he felt his fingers tingling in an unsettling manner, and he quickly set the wand down.

The third wand was a deep red color; it was about as long as the black one had been, but thinner. As Harry’s fingers closed around the handle, he felt an odd sort of pain run up his arm. He almost let go of the wand, but as his fingers loosened he suddenly noted how his magic seemed to reach out desperately to what he was still holding of the wand, wrapping round it and seeming almost to caress it. Harry was torn; pain had never bothered him, but he did not feel comfortable with the idea of a wand that caused him pain every time he handled, for a variety of reasons. However, he’d never seen or felt his magic react to anything like this before, and the feeling he got from it was incredibly pleasant in a deeply satisfying way.

He grasped the wand more tightly, feeling once again the pain, as if his palm was being cut. He lifted the wand out of box. His magic still revolved around the wand, slowly covering it as far as it could read, shifting on its surface as if excited at each new touch, each discovery. Harry waited a bit longer to see if his magic changed its mind or reacted strangely, but after a few moments of the same enchanting dance returned the wand to the box. He then looked down at his palm, wanting to check that he wasn’t actually bleeding; there wasn’t any lasting ache, but he could feel a phantom soreness from the initial pain.

The last box contained a light brown wand, slightly longer than the red one. Harry picked it up gingerly. Immediately he felt odd. His magic seemed drawn to the wand and yet also repelled, as if it could not make up its mind. It wasn’t entirely unpleasant, but it was slightly distracting. Harry put the wand down, intrigued but unsure.

He went back to the third box and picked up the red wand once again. He could feel the pain, cutting into his palm, but now that he was ready for it it didn’t bother him as much. And his magic seemed pleased once again, covering it and almost sinking into it, like it couldn’t bear to be parted. He looked over the area in his hand that was in contact with the wand, and once again there was no injury that could be seen. Having confirmed the lack of a wound, he placed the other three wands

back in their respective places and turned back to Ollivander and the Malfoys. If the wand was actually dangerous, he was sure it wouldn't be sold to children.

Draco had meanwhile already chosen his wand and was excitedly waving it around and producing small fireworks. Both Lucius and Narcissa seemed proudly pleased with their son, although Harry noted how Lucius was still watching him curiously. From where they were standing they would not have been able to see what wand Harry had chosen – or rather, which wand had chosen him. He approached the group, handing Ollivander the box with the red wand. Ollivander gave him a slight smile before taking the box and opening it. His smile abruptly fell off and Harry felt his stomach sink.

“Oh my, Mr. Potter,” he said. His voice was soft and sad. “Oh my.”

“What is it, Mr. Ollivander?” Narcissa asked him, noticing the man’s distress. Draco stopped waving around his wand and looked over to them.

“What’s wrong, Harry?”

Harry shook his head slightly. Ollivander placed the box on the table next to him and drew out the wand. Harry noted how Narcissa’s and Lucius’ eyes widened as they caught sight of it and wished fervently he’d stayed with the light brown wand which his magic wasn’t sure whether to like or not but at least didn’t feel uncomfortable.

“10 inches. Basilisk fang and...bloodwood.” He paused for a moment. “Using this wood for a wand is exceedingly rare, Mr. Potter. Do you know why that is?” Harry shook his head.

“Bloodwood is not like other kinds of wood; it will not bond to most cores. It takes a very powerful, unique core to bind with bloodwood, Mr. Potter, rather as with the wizard.” He turned his grey eyes on Harry. “What do you feel, Mr. Potter, when you hold this wand?”

Harry swallowed lightly. The Malfoys were all silent, watching the exchange.

“I...I feel a slight pain in my hand. But then my magic is very attracted to the wand; it’s the only wand my magic seems to accept at all.”

Ollivander nodded, sighing. “That seems about right Mr. Potter. Bloodwood is quite extraordinary, as I’m sure will you be.” He placed the wand back in the box and handed it to Harry. “Do not worry about the pain; it is a natural response between two powerful entities bonding. So long as your magic accepts the wand it will never bring you to harm, and it is most likely the only wand you will ever be able to properly wield.”

Harry nodded. He believed Ollivander’s words, although he wasn’t sure why. The box in his hands pulsed with magic.

“Mr. Malfoy’s wand will be 6 galleons. I’m afraid your wand, Mr. Potter, is slightly more expensive. It will cost 13 galleons.”

Harry paid him without hesitation; given his fortune, 7 galleons more or less were nothing to him. He was still unsettled enough with the events on the wand that he barely noticed as Narcissa ushered him out of the shop with Draco and Lucius in tow and walked him over to a bench in a secluded section of the Alley, where they could not be easily observed by passerby; there she sat him down carefully.

They were silent for a while until Harry finally looked up. They all seemed worried; even Lucius was looking at him with what Harry could barely identify as concern, although it was more a

feeling he got from his magic than from the man's carefully guarded expression. He smiled softly at them, feeling a sudden flash of affection for this family which for some reason he couldn't properly fathom was being genuinely nice to him.

"Thank you. I...I'm sorry for that, I was a bit unsettled about...about the wand."

She nodded, understanding. "Don't worry, dear. It was an unexpected surprise for all of us. No one could have expected you to bond with bloodwood, after all." She gave the box held tightly in his hand a wary glance.

They stood up and continued walking down the Alley back to where Madam Malkin's was. After a moment Draco managed to engage Harry in a conversation about potions, telling him of the basics of potion-making and all the things he had to know. Harry appreciated the blonde's attempt at distracting him, especially since it was with useful information that he really was interested in listening to. Eventually they reached their destination.

"We will have to leave now, Harry." Narcissa said apologetically. "It was very nice meeting you, and I hope we can do so again sometime." She smiled at him, and Harry smiled back. Lucius nodded.

"It was a pleasure, Mr. Potter. I would be more than happy to discuss politics with you further in the future," he said, graciously. Harry thanked him with a small bow, appreciating the gesture greatly from the Malfoy patriarch.

Draco smiled at him. "We'll probably see you at the train soon. Take care until then."

Harry smiled widely back. "Yeah, definitely. You too."

The Malfoys then departed, and Harry watched the beautiful trio disappear down the street with a flutter of warmth in his heart and a box with a blood red wand clutched in his hand.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so glad that people like this story! Thank you everyone for your kind comments. Please know that I read them all and appreciate them all. Thank you so much.

I'd like to make a very small point for this story, and for this chapter in particular. This story is an AU. It is based on the original, but characters and events will vary significantly from canon, in a variety of ways.

Thank you for reading! <3

Librorum

For a little while after the Malfoys were gone, Harry sat silently on the bench musing on his situation. It was getting late already; he hadn't noticed time go by while he'd been with the family, and although he wanted to go to the bookshop as soon as possible, he didn't want to be caught out in the dark in the unfamiliar Alley. He'd learned quickly that being out after dark was not a safe idea, especially not in a place where he was surrounded by people whose capabilities and inclinations he wasn't yet sure of, such as wizards. He didn't think the Malfoys would have left him alone in a dangerous place, but something which was commonsense to them might not be so for Harry, and as such dangerous. As well, he wasn't sure yet about how magic was handled, a thought which troubled him deeply, and so was hesitant at the idea of remaining outside too late. From the sun's position, he estimated he had about another two hours before it got fully dark.

He hesitated, however, at the entrance to the bookshop, Flourish and Blotts. He didn't have time right now for his school books; he wanted to browse the shop as extensively as possible and right now he'd have to cut that short, but he did feel that it was important that he attempt to find out who he was, and perhaps something of the more common Wizarding customs. He'd gotten lucky with the Malfoys, and he didn't expect that to hold out. After a moment of deliberation, he stepped up to the shop.

20 minutes later, he stepped back out with three books tucked inside a bag the manager, Mr. Blotts, had given him. The first one, titled *Famous Wizards and Witches of the 20th Century*, by Peter Francis, was where Harry hoped to find out about his fame, as well as other celebrities about whom he was probably expected to know something about. He'd quickly checked the Glossary just to make sure the book did in fact contain information on him. For a moment, he wished desperately not to see his name in the book, and yet the ink showed the print clearly, *Potter, Harry - page 138*, and Harry had to control his breathing for a moment. This was real. He really was famous. Even having everyone know who he was didn't really set the idea into his mind as seeing it written down in a book did. This was very, very real.

The second book, titled *Customs and Traditions*, by Fritz Swisch, was a book which encompassed Wizarding traditions from many years back. It focused mostly on the pureblood aspects of society, according to Mr. Blotts, something which Harry felt he really ought to get in touch with if he wanted to continue being friends with the Malfoys, which he did. From what Gornuk had said, he was relatively certain that as a Potter he was also a pureblood, and so felt that it would be in his best interests to pursue those traditions. The third and final book was the only one which he'd bought which had to do with academic life; it was a potions book, titled *Extended Theory of Potion-Making*, by Libatius Borage. He'd bought it in honor of Draco, who he was sure would be delighted that he'd taken an interest in the subject. It was a higher level book that he perhaps would be expected to be reading; the shop's manager had looked vaguely alarmed at the choice, and Harry had had to claim that it was for a friend of his who wanted to study Potions so that the man would let him buy it in peace. It reminded Harry a bit of the school-teacher that had treated him like an idiot, but by now he'd come to terms with the fact that most adults were simply too set in their views of children as ignorant dunderheads, and Harry honestly didn't care enough to try and change it. He'd stored his wand in his own bag once it became clear that it was getting in the way. He didn't want to have to explain to anyone his odd wand, and began to plan on ways of hiding his wand's color. He hoped it wasn't a Hogwarts requirement that he declare his wand type and core, and wondered if there were other ways of detecting what he wand was than by visual cues. Harry himself definitely could feel a peculiar pulsing in the wand's magic, which was what had drawn him to it in the first place. However, if Ollivander's comment merited anything, his talent was not common, so he felt safe in assuming that 'magic sensitivity' would not reveal his secret.

He stopped briefly in a bakery for a sandwich; there were all sorts of interesting pastries, a few of which were moving about their glass display cases and which Harry wasn't sure he could have brought himself to eat anyways. He made sure his hair covered his scar before talking to the nice woman at the counter, as at the bookshop. He wasn't sure what to do about it yet; his first instinct was to attempt to rearrange the skin on his forehead so the scar became less visible, or became unrecognizable. He quickly discarded that idea, as the scar was essentially the proof of his identity, and explaining how he'd managed the change might get awkward.

He chewed thoughtfully on his ham sandwich as he traipsed down the road, the light beginning to dwindle around him. The crowd had thinned, and now there were only a few people walking by, who seemed to be going home from a hard day at work. Harry could feel, however, a sense of unease as the day slowly came to a close, and was glad he'd decided to return to the pub. He reached the Leaky Cauldron, noting with interest that from the side of the Alley, the entrance to the pub seemed to be a normal opening; he could, however, detect an odd shift in the magic of the entrance. He approached Tom, who was standing at the same place as before, polishing a glass slowly. He looked up and smiled as Harry approached.

"Hello, lad. Have a good day?"

Harry nodded. "Quite, thank you." He paused, then asked carefully, "Sir, how much would renting a room out for a week cost?"

Tom seemed surprised at his question, and Harry supposed he didn't get many 11-year-olds asking for lodging.

"Well, lad..." he began, frowning. "You must understand that this is an odd situation...if you don't mind me asking, why do you need lodging? Where are your parents?"

Harry contained the urge to sigh. He wasn't looking forward to revealing his identity, but he'd rather not lie to someone who he was relatively certain he'd have to interact with further in the future. He came closer to Tom, on the other side of the bar where the other customers would not be able to see them clearly.

"Please don't say anything," he said, "I really don't want to cause a fuss."

Tom looked confused and vaguely wary, but nodded. Harry placed down the bag with the books on the floor and then raised the fringe covering his scar. Tom's eyes widened, and Harry brought the lock of hair down.

"Please, Sir," he whispered pleadingly, "I just need a place to stay for the week. I won't be a bother at all. I can pay."

Tom stood there for a moment before managing to control his shock.

"Harry Potter," he whispered softly, as if in awe. "Harry Potter."

Harry nodded, awkward. He picked his bag back up and retreated to the other side of the bar. Tom stood there quietly for another moment before shaking his head sharply and then turning back to Harry. "I won't say anything as long as no one asks, and I won't question why you want to stay here. You can stay here for free as long as you wish," he said, quieting down Harry's initial protests with a firm shake of his head. "It's the least I can do for you after what you've done for us, Mr. Potter."

Harry swallowed thickly. What on *earth* had he done?!

He nodded, thanking Tom, who nodded back shakily before handing him a key and then leading him over across the pub and into a separate section which was lined with doors with numbers on the top. He stopped in front of one which had a number 6.

“This is room number 6. It will be yours for the week. This establishment has all the standard anti-burglar spells, of course, and privacy wards. If you need anything, lad, please call me.” He then turned to Harry fully, and Harry was startled to see tears brimming in the man’s eyes. A slight smile was turned on him.

“Harry Potter,” Tom said softly, before bowing and then returning back the way they’d come to the pub. Harry stood there, feeling awkward and a little like running away. However, he pushed down the feeling, unlocked the door to his room and went inside.

The room was cozy and clean, and honestly a lot nicer than Harry expected from the pub’s dingy appearance. He set down his book-bag and the backpack at the foot of the bed, retrieving the book on famous witches and wizards. He sat down on the comfy bed, opening the book to page 138.

He stiffened.

There, under his name written in beautiful calligraphy, was a photo of himself. Not just of himself, though; it was a photo of him as a baby, probably no older than a few months. He was being held by a woman, who was smiling at the camera and at the man next to her. The man had his arm around the woman and they all looked happy, proud and pleased.

They all looked like a family.

Harry snapped the book shut, feeling his lungs contract desperately around air that didn’t seem to want to come. He’d never before seen a picture of his parents, and yet the similarity between them was too perfect to ignore. The man had Harry’s hair and he could recognize some of his facial features in him, especially the glasses. The woman, too, looked familiar in a way he could only place with looking in a mirror, although in a subtler way.

James and Lily Potter. His parents.

Harry grit his teeth and opened the book back up. The picture was still there, and he watched it for a few minutes, simply taking in the features of his parents, committing them to memory. Then, he began to read.

Harry Potter

Born on the 31st of July, 1980, Harry James Potter is the son of Lily and James Potter. He is famous for his defeat of the Dark Wizard known as Voldemort (You-Know-Who, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named) on the 31st of October, 1981, therefore bringing about the end of the First Wizarding War. Through as of yet unexplained circumstances, he survived the Killing Curse, defeating You-Know-Who in the process. He is the only known survivor of this Curse, which left as its only reminder a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead.

Harry blinked. He then read the passage again, then once more. Once he was sure he hadn’t actually made any mistake in reading the book, he closed it once again.

He’d defeated a Dark Wizard and by this ended a war, when he was *one*, through ‘as of yet unexplained circumstances’?

“*Hoc ridiculum est,*” he murmured, frowning. His first reaction was to call bullshit, but everyone

seemed pretty certain he'd done *something*. He could probably talk about it with Tom later, perhaps asking him if he had any theories on why he'd survived this Curse. He had some himself, but first he'd have to check out what the Killing Curse did on itself; did it stop his heart? Vanish his blood? Explode his brain? It also struck Harry as odd that there was only the one Killing Curse. He'd have thought there were thousands of ways to kill someone. What made this one so special?

Satisfied for now with the answer he'd gotten to the looming question of his fame, he retrieved the book on Potions. He'd start reading the book on traditions later on; right now his brain ached to learn something scientific, or as close as it could come to with magic, and Potions seemed as good a place to start as any. He opened the book to the introduction, and settled down on the bed to read comfortably.

He woke the next morning to a knock on his door.

“Yes?” he called out blearily, rubbing his eyes. He'd gone to sleep late last night; the Potions book had been more interesting than he'd thought, filled with a variety of information on ingredients and techniques for potions’ brewing that had Harry struggling to understand. He did enjoy a challenge, however, and he promised himself to devote at least 30 minutes every day until school started to memorizing as many as he could of the various magical plants and animals described in the book as possible. He planned to devote an hour to learning theory every day, as well; it reminded him of what he'd read on chemistry mixed with cooking, although he wasn't sure he'd enjoy consuming most of the potions described in the book. Even so, what he'd read until now had been quite fascinating, and Harry was looking forwards to classes in Hogwarts, especially since it was with Draco's Godfather.

“Lad, I forgot to tell you yesterday, but we serve breakfast until 10 am. It's 9:30, would you like me to save you something?” It was Tom.

Harry yawned and got out of the bed. “No, that's alright. I'll go in a moment, thank you.”

“Alright, lad.” Tom replied, and Harry heard his footsteps disappear down the hall. He yawned again, looking around briefly. Everything was as he'd left it last night, lit by the morning sun streaming in through the curtains. He straightened his shirt and pressed his hands against it, noting that he should probably buy a pair of pajamas or at least a change in clothing. He didn't really mind wearing the same thing every day, but others might ask questions.

“*Purgo*,” he said, pushing some of his magic into the shirt. He felt it reach through the strands quickly, spreading over skin for a moment before it settled in. Then, there was a slight sound, like a puff of air, and a cloud of dust emanated from his shirt. He waved his hand around it, pushing it away from himself with a light sheen of magical intent which prevented the dust from clinging back onto him. His shirt was now looking as clean a new. He repeated the spell on his pants, then, after a moment of hesitation, brushed his hair over his forehead with his fingers, making sure it covered his scar.

He ate breakfast sedately, reading the newspaper as he did; he thought it was important to be acquainted with current events in the Wizarding world, as they were liable to be a topic of conversation with his school-mates. He'd gotten a shock when he'd first seen the newspapers; the pictures moved! He'd managed to control his shock, however, and thanked Tom, who had been the one to provide it for him, a newspaper which heralded on its cover the words “The Daily Prophet”.

There wasn't any particularly interesting news; there were a few mentions of magical beasts being sighted in Africa, as well as an article on the Greengrass Family having donated a handsome sum to St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries.

He was excited about going back to the bookstore, but he wanted to get a trunk first, so as to be able to store all his Hogwarts supplies. He took a quick shower in the adjoined bathroom to his room and picked out one of the school robes to wear over his Muggle clothes.

The walk down the Alley was uneventful, if pleasant in a simple way. Harry noted that now that he was dressed in proper Wizard attire, he was attracting even less attention than usual, and felt himself relax and he walked down the street inconspicuously. He reached the shop with the trunks and went inside.

It was larger than Ollivanders, but not as large as Flourish and Blotts. The large amount of trunks all around the shop gave in an interesting look, and Harry found himself getting lost in the multitude of tiny details in many of the decorations. He could sense some trunks vibrated with an inordinate amount of magic compared to others, and relative to their size, and he wondered what that meant.

“Good morning, may I help you?”

Harry turned at to look at the man who had addressed him, a medium-sized, unassuming man who smiled at him pleasantly. He smiled back.

“Yes, please. I'm looking for a trunk in which I can carry a large amount of materials, mostly books, but also Potions ingredients and the like.” After his reading that night, he was determined to experiment with Potions on his own. There were already a few ideas he wanted to try out, and he wasn't even a tenth of the way through the book.

The shopkeeper nodded, looking slightly perplexed at his request. “Of course, of course. We have a variety of trunks which were made especially to host a library and a potions pantry; they are usually bought by Professors or Masters, however.” He didn't seem to know exactly how to go on. Harry smiled, although inside he wished people would stop assuming things and simply let him buy the stuff he wanted.

“I know, but I'd like to buy one now so that it will last me for many years. A long-term investment,” he said. The man nodded, understanding, although he still looked unsure. However, he led Harry over to the collection of trunks from which Harry could feel the largest emanation of magic. He gestured to the three in the front, which were organized by size.

“The smallest one here can contain about 50 books, store about 20 standard-size vials. The medium can handle 100 books and 50 vials. The largest can hold up to 150 books and 100 vials. All three also contain a section for clothes and the like, as well as security charms which you may provide a password for, or key in to your magical signature if you prefer. The smallest costs 200 galleons, the medium 400 and the largest 700. Any further spells will come with an additional price, although the security charms are included.”

Harry nodded. “Could I see the inside of the largest one?” he said. He had a feeling he would very quickly fill up the allowed size of the other two, and wondered if he could make any modifications to the trunk himself. Honestly he thought he could probably make a better trunk on his own, but until he could claim he'd learned how at Hogwarts, he didn't want to go down that route. Any modifications, he could claim had come as part of the original trunk.

After a quick run through of what the trunk looked like on the inside and how it worked – how to

unlock it, how to lock it back up, how to rifle through the various sections inside the trunk, how to browse the library and potions, how the security worked – Harry told the man he'd buy it. The man looked fairly surprised; he'd obviously expected Harry not to be able to pay for it, but once he saw Harry opening the gold-filled backpack his eyes widened and he nodded.

Harry paid for the trunk and quickly left the shop. The man looked like he wanted to ask questions and Harry wasn't sure he wanted to give answers; the man would soon find out who he was anyways.

He walked briskly down the alley, carrying the trunk next to him. As soon as he'd exited the shop, Harry had discretely placed his light-weight spell on it, making sure the words were said as quietly as possible so no one else would notice.

He went back to Flourish and Blotts, where Mr. Blotts greeted him warmly if tiredly. Harry could see a few children with their parents running about, a few of them his age, some older. He wondered if any of them were going to Hogwarts. Were there other schools around?

He'd told Mr. Blotts yesterday that he would buy his school books, and the manager had indicated a section where apparently all the Hogwarts issues were kept. Harry grabbed a basket from near the door, in which to carry his books, and quickly walked over and picked out the ones specified in the Hogwarts letter. The basket held a light-weight spell, and so Harry had no trouble carting it around as he began browsing the shelves.

He eventually approached the front desk a few hours later with around twenty books which he'd been unable to leave without buying. He'd tried to control his urge to get almost every book, knowing that they were liable to be at Hogwarts or in his family library, but he supposed it didn't much matter. He didn't mind having doubles.

He'd bought, apart from those specified in his curriculum, 2 more potions books, of which one delved further into theory and the other was specifically on magical ingredients and their effects. He'd bought 2 books on Arithmancy; he'd always liked math, but he accepted that he wasn't very good at it. He was fine working with physics, but when asked abstract questions about functions or trigonometry he often complicated the situation much more than he should and didn't arrive at a proper answer. Give him something to work towards, an application, even if theoretical, and he could do it well; give him an equation and a relationship and he wasn't sure what to do with it. Harry wasn't particularly worried about his limitation towards the abstract; he was intrinsically practical, and as he had no trouble with actual problems with actual applications, he wasn't too troubled. Still, he'd like to get a better grasp on various topics; thus, the books.

He'd bought 3 additional books on magical theory; one of them delved into the different kinds of magic which could be used, such as in spells, charms and potions. Another focused on the creation of spells; he'd also bought 2 books on runes, which were apparently the main binding feature between magic and the rest of the world, although there were also others, such as rituals. The last one was on the theoretical relationship between Witches and Wizards, and Magic, which Harry hoped could answer some of his questions on wands and his own, apparently unusual magic use.

The last book was smaller than the rest, dark and without lettering on the cover. Harry had been walking in a dark, musty section near the back of the shop which didn't seem like many people often went to, looking to see if anything caught his eye. He'd felt a strange shifting in the magic around the book, similar to the one he could feel on his wand, and he'd opened it after carefully removing it from its shelf. It looked like it hadn't been touched in a long time, the pages slightly yellowed with age and brittle.

The first page was blank except for a few words, written in small, elegant print near the center of

the book.

Sanguis Magicae

Harry blinked. That seemed promising.

He sighed as he placed the book in his basket, hidden under *The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1)* by Miranda Goshawk. He was certain that if others saw the book, he'd be asked about it. There was a certain air to it that bespoke mystery, and although part of Harry wanted to leave it behind and not get even further entangled into strange objects, he simply couldn't when it felt so much like his mysterious wand. Speaking of his wand, he still wasn't sure what to do about its color. He'd experiment with it back in Privet Drive; he didn't trust that his magic would go unnoticed within Diagon Alley.

The manager looked even more tired than yesterday; he sighed when he saw the large amount of books Harry'd bought. For a moment Harry wondered if the man would have to look at the all, and if he'd have to explain the odd black book, but Mr. Blotts simply touched the basket with his wand (which was not red, Harry noted, but a pleasant shade of light brown) and a piece of paper suddenly appeared on his desk with 3 numbers.

“That will be 1 galleon, 4 sickles and 13 knuts.”

Harry took out two galleons from his bag and paid. He then quickly transferred the books from the basket to his trunk, making sure the black book stayed hidden at all times. Mr. Blotts didn't seem particularly interested, looking around the shop and checking that the other customers weren't damaging the books or needed help. As soon as Harry was finished, he thanked Mr. Blotts and exited the shop.

He spent the next hour buying the rest of the necessary equipment for Hogwarts, then went to the Apothecary he'd seen near the entrance to Diagon Alley. He asked the shopkeeper for the basic Hogwarts supplies first, then he asked for a variety of different ingredients which Borage had stated were a good starting point for experimenting with techniques and reactions without fear of death or destruction. He was tempted to buy a few extra ingredients, but knew from experience with his own experiments with magic that playing with magical substances one didn't understand was a good way to get maimed or killed, no matter how prepared he thought he was.

Done with the necessary shopping, he returned to the Leaky Cauldron, where he ate lunch and then retreated to his room to investigate his new acquisitions. He spent the afternoon reading, first going further in the Potions book and then getting sucked in with the Runes text. He'd planned to begin investigating the small black book, but the thought slipped his mind as he became enraptured in the Runes. He quickly realized with excitement that it was basically like learning Latin had been, a new language, with different writing, grammatical rules and possible applications. He was so interested in the book, that when he looked back up he realized that the moon was already up and that he'd missed the chance to go back out to the Alley again today. He didn't particularly mind; Runes were fascinating, and although Harry knew he still had a long way to go before he'd be able to understand and use them properly, he was excited at the prospect. The author had mentioned various times that Runes were often difficult for most people because their true nature lay not in modern languages, but in Latin. As such, most people had to either memorize them directly or attempt to learn Latin, which not many succeeded at particularly well.

Harry, obviously, had an advantage there. He still had to learn the Runic symbols and all the rules to the language, not to mention eventually have an instinctive grasp on when something was *wrong*, but he was sure that with enough time and practice, he would be as good at them as he was at Latin. He was, after all, a very dedicated person to that which interested him, and Runes was

definitely interesting enough.

He fell asleep that night clutching the Runes book to his chest, feeling lighter than he ever remembered at the vast swathe of possibilities he could feel unfurling under his hands, thrumming under his skin like his magic.

Absconde

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Minerva McGonagall gave a tired sigh as she gave one last look around her. Everything was prepared for the arrival of the new first-years. Usually, she wouldn't be as nervous; she had been doing this for a while, after all, and it was all pretty routine. This year, however, there was a spot on the map.

The Chosen One. The Saviour of the Wizarding World. The Vanisher of the Dark Lord.

Harry Potter, son of James and Lily Potter, was coming to Hogwarts this morning, and Minerva really wasn't sure what to do about that. On one hand, she knew she would treat him as she would any other student; how could she not? She was, above all, a fair-minded person, and did not believe the boy's actions deserved he be treated differently, however grateful she was to him for them. Albus supported this point of view; Minerva frowned slightly as she thought of the older wizard. Although she deeply respected Albus, she found that there were certain decisions which she did not agree with, as well as certain aspects of his personality she found slightly off.

The choice of the Potter heir's...accommodations had not given her any good feelings the first time, nor any subsequent time she had visited the growing boy, although she had to admit it had not been often.

She was actually quite worried about the boy's living situation; she had observed that the boy did not go to school, although the reason for this was not obvious. His relationship with his relatives was strained, at best; he clearly had few, if any, friends and none that Minerva had observed directly. She hoped that he'd find friends here at Hogwarts; it couldn't be healthy for a child not to have friends growing up, not to mention simply a depressing prospect for Lily and James' son, two people for whom Minerva felt quite a bit of affection.

The evident sound of Hagrid's impending arrival at the castle's entrance brought her out of her thoughts, and she composed herself so as to not allow her expression to betray her worries. She'd see how Potter got along with the children, and attempt to help him along if needed, as she would for any of the other children under her care. The idea that the boy might not be a Gryffindor never crossed her mind; both Lily and James had been Gryffindors, after all, and she could not imagine that Harry could be all that different from them.

A few moments later, Hagrid's great body came into view, followed by a swarm of tiny first-years; Minerva couldn't help trying to identify the Potter heir among them.

He was quickly identified; his dark, unruly hair which looked almost identical to James' was easy to spot. However, it was his brilliant green eyes which truly set him apart from the group in Minerva's opinion; they were a bright emerald which looked remarkably like Lily's had, and Minerva felt her chest tighten slightly as nostalgia overtook her for a moment. She shook off the feeling a moment later, moving her gaze away from him so as to not be so obvious. She noted abruptly that he was talking quietly to a boy with very distinctive blonde hair; the newest Malfoy to join Hogwarts, no doubt. How odd to see a Potter and a Malfoy getting along, was her next thought. She shook her head and straightened. She was not to get lost in the situation of a single student, no matter how important he might be.

"The firs' years, Professor McGonagall," said Hagrid, smiling at her. She nodded firmly.

"Thank you, Hagrid. I will take them from here."

She then led the first-years to a small chamber off to the side of the Entrance Hall to give the standard welcome speech. All through it, she did her best to keep her eyes off the Potter heir, focusing instead on a smaller boy who had his cloak fastened under his left ear, and a gangly, distinctively red-head child. The latest Weasley, then. She could only hope he would not be like his twin brothers, although from his less-than-spotless appearance she could not guess at much decorum.

"I shall return when we are ready for you," she said, finally coming to the end of the speech and hoping that some of it at least would set the children at ease. "Please wait quietly."

She exited the chamber, closing the door behind her, and made her way to the Great Hall. Albus met her at the entrance, smiling with twinkling eyes.

"Everything alright, Minerva? I trust you can handle the new first-years?"

Minerva nodded. "As usual, Albus. Is everything in order at the Hall for the Sorting?"

"Quite."

They were silent for a moment, then Albus' expression turned slightly more serious.

"Is Harry Potter here?"

She nodded again. "Yes. Albus..." she paused, taking in a deep breath. "He looks so much like James, but his eyes are Lily's. He's quite a sight, that child."

Albus gave her an understanding look. "No matter what happens, Minerva, you must not allow his parentage to cloud your judgment on him."

She huffed, indignant. "Nonsense, Albus. You know I would never treat a child differently due to who their parents were!"

He raised his hands in a placating manner. "Of course not, Minerva. But we all know Harry is a special case. We must all be more careful than usual with that child."

She deflated. "You know I will do my best, as I always have with all children."

He nodded, his expression once again benign. "That I do. I can only hope all the other teachers will be as fair as you, Minerva."

She frowned lightly, pursing her lips. "Severus will undoubtedly find it hard to bear."

Albus nodded. "I have spoken to him. He will attempt not to let it affect him, but we must be understanding of his situation."

"I am not saying that I do not understand his position, Albus. I am well aware of how much he suffered under James' reign." She shot him an accusing glare, to which Albus's expression turned saddened. Minerva had made it very clear that she greatly disapproved of how Albus had dealt with James' and Severus' relationship, but the truth was that Albus did not know how else he could have handled it. Children could be cruel, especially those raised under the impression of power and omnipotence, such as James Potter. It was part of the reason why he had insisted that Harry be raised by his non-magical relatives. It meant he would not grow to be the kind of teenager that James had been. The late Potter Lord had been a good person at heart, but it had taken Lily's love

and many years for it to truly come to light, and even then he still always kept an arrogance and pride which made dealing with him difficult at times.

“I regret the situation as much as you do, Minerva; we can take solace in the fact that Severus now has his life under his control, at least.”

“Paltry solace, that,” she said, but the fight seemed to have left her. “I will go retrieve the first-years. Excuse me, Albus.”

With that, she returned to the room and brought out the students, leading them to the Hall where the Sorting Ceremony would take place.

Harry had, after the first week in the Cauldron, decided that it was not worth the trouble of returning to Privet Drive, where his freedom would be cut short by the Dursleys. He had arranged with Tom for a longer stay – until the school year started, only two weeks later – and then returned to the Muggle world to announce to his relatives the situation. The Dursleys had at first refused to allow him to go, but once Harry had explained that they would not need to pay for anything, and in fact would probably not need to see him at all for the next few years they accepted the compromise. Their original cover-story for why Harry was not attending school in Muggle London was that he had a ‘special condition’, and so was being home-schooled. Now, they could claim his condition had gotten worst and had had to send him to relatives abroad to get better care. Harry didn’t much care for how they justified his strange behavior, as long as they did not present him with any obstacles in his attendance to Hogwarts.

Next he’d gone to talk to Sandy. At first, he’d considered telling her the truth, but after a bit more of investigating into the subject of the history between Muggles and Wizards, had decided against it. It was apparently quite illegal, not to mention dangerous, and so instead had told her that he was being sent by his relatives to a boarding school abroad because they didn’t want to have to deal with him.

She’d cried a little, hugging him and asking him to write every once in a while. He hugged her back briefly, before promising to do as she asked. She’d wiped her eyes, then taken out the copy of the *Satyricon* that she’d promised him.

“Here. Let this be a parting gift from me. You can keep the Divine Comedy, as well. I’m pretty sure you appreciate those books more than anyone else I know,” she said, smiling with a watery look in her eyes.

Harry blinked, before giving her another, longer hug. He really did care for her, despite being unable to tell her of anything else about magic. What little he’d already revealed was dangerous enough.

They promised to stay in touch, and Harry once again left for the Leaky Cauldron, the new book tucked under his arm.

He’d talked to Tom about how he was going to get to Hogwarts, and he’d been told that he had to go to “King’s Cross, then to Platform ¾, on the 1st of September. The train will take you directly to Hogwarts.”

Harry looked confused. "I'm sorry. Did you just say Platform ¾?"

Tom laughed. "Yes, lad. ¾. Never been there, I take it? Don't worry, it's nothing complicated. There will be a barrier right between Platforms 9 and 10, and you pass through it to get to 9 ¾. You'll be getting a ticket to get on the train any day now, it'll all be there."

When Harry had first asked for lodging for the next two weeks, Tom had looked at him oddly. Harry immediately knew he had to make an excuse; it was undoubtedly not a normal occurrence for a small child to be requesting lodging for such a long time.

"It's my family, sir," he'd said, looking very sad. Tom had stiffened at this; he was obviously aware of the fate of Harry's parents. "They...I...after what happened with You-Know-Who...there has been a bit of trouble and I...it was made clear that it was best if I stayed away for a while." He looked up at the barman with wide eyes, who looked vaguely angry for Harry's sake and exceedingly guilty at asking. Internally, Harry smirked. His voice dropped even lower, like he was embarrassed at his admission.

"I don't mean to be a bother, sir, I'm very sorry. I understand it must be troublesome having me here...you have been so kind. I'm sure I could find lodging elsewhere." Tom's eyes widened even further and he seemed torn between feeling extremely saddened and angry at himself for even questioning Harry's stay. *Hook, line and sinker.*

The bar-owner had made no questions after that, and had treated Harry even nicer. Harry didn't really care for it all, but welcomed the change as long as it meant his past and decisions were not looked into. He'd gotten his ticket for the train a few days later, and had tucked it safely into his trunk; that answered the nagging worry he'd had that the man at the post office had not actually sent his letter, at least.

Harry had also finally resolved the issue about his wand, although it had been much more trouble than he'd initial thought it would be.

He'd first visited Flourish and Blotts again, looking for a book on wands and wand-making techniques. After a while of searching and being unable to find anything, he'd asked Mr. Blotts; the owner had informed him solemnly that they did not carry books on the subject.

"It is very carefully guarded knowledge, young man. Wands are a special business that only those from certain families follow. Why do you think Ollivander is the only wand-maker around here? It's not like there isn't room for competition, after all."

Harry perked, an idea suddenly occurring to him. "Sir, are there any other wand-makers around?"

Mr. Blotts looked at him curiously, although Harry could tell he was distracted by the sight of a small child making its precarious way around the shop.

"What would you want to do with another wand-maker? Ollivander is the best there is."

Harry shrugged. "Just curious. I mean, he can't be the only one, can he?"

Mr. Blotts didn't really seem to be paying attention to what he was saying. "He isn't, although he's the only one most people go to. He's the only one in Diagon Alley...I think there's one in

Knockturn, but obviously no one wants to go *there*...there might be others out...in Square..." then suddenly he was walking away from Harry hurriedly to where the child was about to knock over a huge pile of books. Harry shook his head, wanting to ask about Knockturn but, having the information he wanted and not willing to brave the growing commotion by the child, exited the shop.

He stood outside for a moment, conflicted about his options. He really didn't want to go to Hogwarts with a conspicuously red wand; from Lucius and Narcissa's expressions when they'd seen the wand, Harry guessed that it was fairly recognizable. He had two choices, then; the first was going to this 'Knockturn Alley' and trying to find the other wand-maker and seeing if he had any wand which could fit Harry. He could go to Ollivander's; there was that one wand which fit him decently, but the man made him really uncomfortable. At worst, he wouldn't find anything in Knockturn, and so he'd go to Ollivander's.

The second option, which Harry honestly felt more comfortable with, if not sure about, was simply experimenting on his own until something worked out. Usually, he'd choose the latter without a second thought, but he was hesitant to experiment on something which he had no knowledge on, such as wands. Those were the kinds of experiments that were liable to get you hurt, and with something as volatile as he knew magic could be on the line, Harry *really* wasn't sure about what could be safe.

Eventually, he decided checking out the other wand-maker couldn't hurt. He cast a quick '*Effugiat*', then murmured "*Dirige me Knockturn Alley*."

His magic twisted for a moment, then fizzed out. Harry shook his head. He hadn't thought that would work, but he'd had to try anyway. Just saying 'Knockturn Alley' was way too general, and his magic, of course, didn't know how to guide him to the entirety of the Alley. He thought for moment.

"*Dirige me aedificatio Knockturn Alley*," he murmured, and this time his magic twisted and then tugged insistently to his left. He followed the tug around Diagon Alley, through a twisting, winding path. Sometimes his magic tried to pull him through a building and Harry had to find a way around it, but it took him no longer than 5 minutes until he was suddenly standing in front of what was clearly the entrance to a different section of the city; it smelled rank and somehow musty, despite being only a few feet away from the brightness of Diagon Alley, and Harry was suddenly very certain of why Mr. Blotts had said no one liked going here. He could sense an oddly unwelcoming breeze in the air, a sort of saturated depression and desperate violence which weighed down on his magic uncomfortably.

Now that he was faced with his option, he was no longer sure it was such a good idea. Sure, he could probably get to the shop unnoticed, but eventually he'd have to expose himself, and he wasn't too willing to risk his neck for the sake of something he wasn't even sure would work. He stood outside the entrance to Knockturn Alley for a few more moments before resolutely turning away and walking back the way he'd come. He'd go to Ollivander's and see if the wizard would sell him the light-wood wand which he'd also picked on his first try; he wasn't ecstatic about the idea, but it was the only one which seemed would not end with him in a hospital.

He walked quickly back to Ollivander's, taking careful note of where the entrance to Knockturn was in regards to Diagon Alley; he dispelled the '*Effugiat*' just before entering, not sure if Ollivander would be able to see through it but not willing to chance another reaction like Gornuk's. Already one person...creature...knowing was enough.

He entered the little shop and bit back a small yelp as Ollivander suddenly appeared in front of

him; the man's lack of magic was as distinctive as ever, and as uncomfortable.

"Mr. Potter. I wasn't expecting to see you again so soon. What can I help you with? Is there a problem with your wand?"

Harry shook his head, controlling his nerves. "No, sir, not as such. I do have a bit of a concern about it, though. I couldn't help but notice, it's quite a...unique wand, isn't it?"

Ollivander nodded solemnly, and Harry got the distinct sense that the man had been expecting this response. "That it is, Mr. Potter, although I am not sure you yet understand the true extent of blood wood's power. However, it seems you are...discomfited by its quite exceptional appearance?" He seemed amused at Harry's expense. Harry nodded, storing away the man's words for further investigation later.

"I know that sounds rather like a shallow worry, but it is quite a concern for me." Ollivander gave no response and Harry tried to conceal his nervousness. He really didn't like being around the man; his dislike at being noticed seemed somehow immature and shallow here, despite the fact that Harry felt that if he wished to remain inconspicuous he had every right to attempt to do so. It was no one else's business what he did and what he thought; he felt attached to the blood-wand, he really did, but he didn't see why everyone else should have to notice it so clearly.

Ollivander watched him closely for a few moments.

"You want another wand," he then said, slowly, somehow seemingly surprised at the turn of events. Harry nodded, unsure why Ollivander viewed the request as odd. Was having more than one wand illegal? The thought hadn't really occurred to him until now, although it made sense. If everyone had 50 wands, then all security measures against criminals would be rather a moot point.

"I mean, it isn't illegal, is it?" he asked, hurriedly. Ollivander seemed unsure of how to answer.

"It isn't...strictly speaking. It is quite frowned upon by the ministry, and of course this is taking into account the fact that the wizard could even *find* more wands which fit him properly. Most wizards only find one, *maybe* two, and even then it will never work as well as the first."

That made sense. "I...there was one other wand here that I know I could work with. It doesn't feel quite as right as this one, but...I could do with it. And what do you mean not 'strictly illegal'?"

Ollivander looked at him curiously. "It isn't illegal, but if they find out you have it they will make you jump through a lot of hoops if you wish to keep it; after all, the kind of wizard who wishes to have two wands is usually not the kind of wizard above using them less to break the law."

Harry frowned, catching onto what Ollivander was not saying. "Do I have to register my wand when I go to Hogwarts? I mean, are you going to register my having bought another wand? Have you even registered my first wand?"

Ollivander smiled faintly. "No, Mr. Potter. To all your questions. I am not part of the Ministry, nor will I ever be. As for Hogwarts...it is not proper for a wizard to be asked to register his wand unless it is necessary under the circumstances. As long as you told no one, and didn't go against the law, no one would have to find out."

Harry really didn't like the way Ollivander was looking at him, like he was some sort of prey. He was also exceedingly uncertain as to why Ollivander was telling him all this. It seemed like the man *wanted* Harry to get the wand, although for what reason, Harry could not fathom. Usually he was so good at reading people, at making them see what he wanted them to see; somehow he felt

like Ollivander could see right through him, and Harry could only see those misty eyes.

“What was the other wand you felt you could do with?” Ollivander asked, motioning over to the wall with all the wands. Having already felt the magic once, Harry easily identified the light-wood wand’s box and pulled it out.

Ollivander took the box and pulled the wand out. His expression suddenly became one of surprise, then a sort of amused interest that had the hair on Harry’s nape standing on edge.

“Curious. How very curious,” he murmured. Harry frowned.

“What do you mean? What’s curious?” He was sick and tired of being surprised. Couldn’t he just have a normal time for once since getting here?

Ollivander seemed to pick up on his annoyance. “I remember every wand I’ve ever sold, Mr. Potter. Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in this wand, gave another feather –just one other. It is very curious indeed that this wand should also chose you when its brother... why, its brother gave you that scar.”

Harry felt his throat go dry. “You mean, Voldemort?” He could feel a vague sort of panic brewing in his gut. “That’s who has this wand’s brother, isn’t it? You’ve got to be joking!” He wanted to kick something. Of *course* he would have the brother wand to Voldemort’s.

Ollivander looked at him with an expression which seemed to be torn between glee and pity, a most curious look on anyone. “It seems you are indeed destined for great things, Mr. Potter. After all, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things. Terrible, yes – but great.”

Harry wanted to scream, but contained himself.

“You know what, I don’t think I want this wand anymore,” he said irritably, turning around with every intention of leaving the shop. Maybe he could simply paint over his blood-wand or something. If anyone asked he’d say he was ‘artistically inclined’.

“Mr. Potter.”

Ollivander’s soft words stopped him in his tracks.

“You cannot hide forever, Mr. Potter.”

Harry felt himself shiver. “I’m not hiding. I’m simply not...being this. Whatever you want me to be, this...Savior. The Chosen One. I’m not being him, I *am* not him, I’m just Harry Potter, I just..” *really like Latin.*

He didn’t hear any movement behind him, but suddenly Ollivander’s voice was right behind him.

“And that is precisely what I mean. Do you think this wand chose you because of your scar? Do you think your blood wand chose you because of events that you had no choice in, and that you cannot remember?”

Harry swerved and glared. “Are you saying they didn’t?”

Ollivander did not answer, but something in his expression made all of Harry’s anger flee, replaced by a kind of tired acceptance which Harry had come to associate with the dreams he’d had of ever being rescued from the Dursleys before he’d discovered his magic. Ollivander handed out the box with the phoenix-core wand, and Harry took it meekly.

“Holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple; a rather unusual combination. That will be 7 Galleons.”

Harry paid him and, without another word, left the shop. Well, at least he’d gotten what he’d come for.

Apart from his wand, he’d also finally managed to understand what the Hogwarts letter had meant by “an owl”; they meant, of course, a literal owl and after some deliberation Harry had decided to buy one for himself. It was a large, black barn owl, which he’d whimsically named Aeolus after the Greek god of wind.

He’d met the Malfoys once again at the train station; he’d followed Tom’s instructions with a little trepidation, but had managed to get to the station without any mishaps. Draco had been quite happy to see him again, much more than Harry had honestly expected him to be; they’d only met for a few hours, after all. Draco’s face had split into a wide grin as they’d met on the entrance to the train, only managing to contain it after a few seconds behind his pure-blood mask. Lucius and Narcissa had been as pleasant as before, although they were much more subdued and proper in front of all the other Wizarding families. They’d talked for a little while outside the train, about their respective activities the past weeks. Harry didn’t contribute much, merely stating he’d invested his time in reading a lot and preparing for classes. Draco was perfectly content to fill the silence, telling him about the family trip to France and the various galas and activities he’d attended.

When it was time for the train to leave, they bid Draco’s parents goodbye and got on. They quickly found an empty compartment and settled in. A few minutes after the train had departed, Harry took out his holly wand. For a moment, Draco looked confused, before he suddenly looked up at Harry.

“What happened to your blood wand?” he asked. Harry sighed.

“I need to talk to you about that. Look, you know bloodwood isn’t...common, right?”

Draco nodded, looking unsure. “My parents explained it a bit. I’d never heard of blood-wands before, although I had heard of blood magic. It’s quite a bit more powerful than regular magic, especially in the case of rituals and the like. Unfortunately, the Ministry considers blood magic to be largely dark, and so people with blood wands as well.”

Harry froze. “What do you mean? Why is blood magic considered Dark?” Something seemed to nag at his memory, like a sense of having forgotten something important. Harry tried to think about it, but it seemed to slip away until he was no longer sure what he’d been trying to remember. Well, if it was important, he’d remember eventually.

He wasn’t exactly sure what being ‘Dark’ meant, but it seemed to be frowned upon. The ‘Dark Lord’ fiasco certainly seemed to point in that direction, although Harry wasn’t sure why that was. He was against the idea that anything or anyone could be intrinsically bad; things and people could only be bad in context, when they went against a goal of some sort. He was particularly skeptical about tools being bad, and so far, magic didn’t really seem like much more than a tool for anything. Was uranium intrinsically bad, because it was radioactive and caused mutations and death? Or was it intrinsically good, because it provided huge amounts of energy? Or would it be good as long as it was only causing mutations and death in the enemy?

He accepted, however, that he didn't really know much about magic; for all he knew, some of it might in fact be intrinsically bad, although he wasn't sure how that would work. He did concede that if *anything* could be bad in and of itself, magic was the likeliest candidate. After all, *magic*. However, what really worried him was the opinion of those around him. Even though he might not think anything was evil, other people might not agree, and there went his freedom and privacy.

Draco shrugged. "Probably because it was used largely for illegal activities. I mean, it's the Ministry that decides what is Dark and what isn't, and they are supposed to stand for the Law. Obviously that doesn't mean they are always right, or that blood magic is Dark...however that is decided. But it does mean that blood magic is carefully regulated, and the owners of blood wands observed, no matter what they've actually done or not."

Harry looked at Draco curiously, relaxing. Sometimes the blond seemed quite shallow; others, he seemed surprisingly smart and introspective. He supposed having parents like Lucius and Narcissa would make a child rather more mature than his years.

Draco looked at him. "So what's with that wand? Did you exchange it?"

Harry shook his head. "I went to Ollivander's. He was quite willing to give me another one which I'd felt an affinity to, although he was quite odd about it. But Draco, I need you not to tell anyone. The whole point of getting another wand was that the blood wand will not be known. I don't want that kind of attention."

Draco looked at him with a shocked expression on his face. "You have two wands? He just *gave* you another one? Just like that?"

"Er...we talked a bit. But, yes. Is that not...usual?"

Draco huffed. "Of course not! Otherwise we'd all be running around with two wands; do you have any idea the kind of chaos that would cause for the Ministry? Not to mention for the Aurors. How did you convince him to give you another wand? It's not money or influence; my father's tried that."

Harry nearly snorted. Of course Lucius would try that. The man was a politician to the core.

"No...I honestly don't really know. I didn't say anything much; I think he was just interested in the fact that I had bonded with the blood-wand, and so was willing to make an exception." He wasn't sure why, but he was unwilling to tell Draco about the holly wand's connection to Voldemort. It wasn't that he didn't trust him, but he just wanted to pretend to be normal, at least for a little bit. He was completely unused this kind of situation, and adjusting was taking him some effort. He could already see it all coming back to bite him in the arse later, but he pretended not to care. Having two wands was already incredible enough, apparently.

Draco nodded, looking thoughtful but accepting that Harry really didn't know. "Ollivander's always been a bit odd. I don't think anyone understands his motivations, or his alliances."

They were silent for a little while before Draco placed a hand on Harry's shoulder.

"I promise I won't tell anyone. I understand the importance of secrecy in delicate matters." He seemed to say the last part a bit bitterly, and Harry wondered what other secrets the blonde was forced to keep. "Of course, if you ever need help with the blood wand, I'll try to lend a hand."

Harry nodded, thankful for the blonde's assistance. There was a kind of calm genuineness to his magic while making the promise that made Harry certain of the blonde's sincerity. If nothing else,

Harry believed Draco's understanding of the need for secrecy in certain matters. People did not become so bitter, so young, over nothing.

The seriousness dissolved slowly as the train ride continued, eventually delving into lighter topics such as Draco's trip and what Hogwarts would be like. Harry confided that he'd read a lot on Potions, which clearly pleased the blonde. Draco told Harry all he knew of the Hogwarts Houses, making it clear that he hoped Harry would be in Slytherin with him. Harry admitted he wasn't sure.

"I mean, it's not that I wouldn't want to be in Slytherin with you, but I don't know it's the right House for me." He didn't say he wasn't sure he'd want to be considered Dark. He was clearly viewed as a sort of Light Symbol after his defeat of the Dark Lord; he didn't want to be a symbol for the Light, but being in Slytherin would be too public a dissent. Ravenclaw seemed safest, all things considered.

There were only a few interruptions on their ride to the castle, once by a bushy-haired girl that tried to request their help with finding a toad – which Draco had firmly pushed out without an answer – and once by the trolley-lady. They eventually changed into their Hogwarts robes as they approached the castle, preparing for their arrival. Harry tried to contain his nerves. Here they were; there was no looking back now, no chance to regret his choice.

Inside the castle, Albus Dumbledore adjusted his half-moon spectacles and gazed outside the window in the direction of where arriving students were congregating. On his perch, Fawkes observed the older wizard with bright eyes.

Finally.

Chapter End Notes

I just wanted to say thank you to everyone for your comments and kudos! I am absolutely stumped by the response to this story; I am so glad everyone's having as much fun reading this as I am writing it. Writing isn't half as much fun as when you know others are also enjoying it, so I'm really glad everyone seems to be doing so :)

Conuenientias

The castle itself was every bit as marvelous as Harry had hoped it would be, and more; the first glimpse he'd caught of it had shocked him so, that it had taken Draco's subtle laughter to realize that his mouth was wide open. He blushed and closed it, shooting a half-hearted glare at the blonde, who smiled back.

They had congregated around a large man who was shouting for "firs' years!" and then went down a winding, narrow passage which ended at the foot of a great lake. There they all had their first view of Hogwarts; Harry was glad to see he was not the only one shocked into silence at the view. They then clambered onto a small fleet of boats, which took them to a small harbor at the foot of the castle. They all walked up a set of stone staircases, finally arriving at the castle door. The large man knocked three times on the castle doors, which opened at once. Harry turned to Draco.

"Who is he?"

Draco's nose crinkled slightly. "I think his name's Hagrid. My father told me something about him; he's some sort of caretaker."

Harry nodded, turning to look at the stern-faced woman that had appeared at the castle doors.

"The firs' years, Professor McGonagall."

"Thank you, Hagrid. I will take it from here," she said.

She then guided the small group into a chamber where she proceeded gave a small speech. Harry wasn't sure if it was his imagination, but throughout the lecture she seemed to be trying very hard not to look in his direction; her magic swerved around her, sometimes a tendril drifting over towards Harry before being swiftly pulled back. He contained a sigh; it seemed even at school he'd be noticed.

Thankfully, she never directly centered her attention on him, which he was grateful for. She left the room for a moment, during which they were suddenly invaded by ghosts. This turned out rather less exiting than Harry would have perhaps liked, all things considered, since all the ghosts were well-behaved, if some rather unnerving.

Eventually, McGonagall returned and lead them all through a pair of much larger doors, and into the Great Hall.

Harry couldn't contain a small gasp as he took in the beautiful room; the ceiling looked like the night sky, dark and dotted with stars. The hall was lit by thousands of small candles floating about in the air, and for a moment Harry had the strange thought that it would be very easy for an accident to take place with so many potential fire hazards. There were four large tables which were filled with students, and at the head of the room was another large table, behind which were seated a group of people who were clearly Professors. Harry's eyes were drawn to the man sitting at the center, an older wizard with long white hair and an even longer beard, and who had more magic flitting around him than Harry had even thought possible. Even Lucius, who Harry already thought had quite a bit of magic, didn't have even a quarter of what this man had. And Harry was certain that this was the famed Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts and Leader of the Light, that he'd read about.

He was caught off guard by a sudden vicious snap of magic next to Dumbledore, and his eyes

drifted to the man sitting to his side; he had very black hair, sallow skin, a hooked nose and eyes which glared at Harry with such intense dislike that Harry was momentarily taken aback. He stared back for a moment, unable to look away from the man's black eyes; then, the Professor seemed to catch himself and turned away from Harry, going back to talking with the man sitting next to him. Harry blinked a few times.

That was unexpected.

His attention was drawn away from the man by McGonagall making them all stand in a line in front of the High Table, facing the other students. He stood next to Draco, with a brown-haired girl at his other side. McGonagall then brought out a four-legged stool, upon which she placed a patched, frayed and rather dirty hat.

Harry had a moment to wonder at the magic he could feel humming strongly about the Hat when suddenly, a rip appeared all along the hat's rim and it began to sing;

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,
But don't judge on what you see,
I'll eat myself if you can find
A smarter hat than me.
You can keep your bowlers black,
Your top hats sleek and tall,
For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat
And I can cap them all.
There's nothing hidden in your head
The Sorting Hat can't see,
So try me on and I will tell you
Where you ought to be.
You might belong in Gryffindor,
Where dwell the brave at heart,
Their daring, nerve, and chivalry
Set Gryffindors apart;
You might belong in Hufflepuff,
Where they are just and loyal,
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true
And unafraid of toil;
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,
if you've a ready mind,
Where those of wit and learning,
Will always find their kind;
Or perhaps in Slytherin
You'll make your real friends,
Those cunning folk use any means
To achieve their ends.
So put me on! Don't be afraid!
And don't get in a flap!
You're in safe hands (though I have none)
For I'm a Thinking Cap!"

Everyone clapped as the hat finished his song, some of the new students still staring at the Hat with gob-smacked expressions of wonder.

Harry, meanwhile, was torn between awe and panic. He could certainly appreciate the Hat's ability

not only to sing, but apparently *think* for itself -- he couldn't even begin to fathom how one would go about crafting such an object; how could it speak through a mouth without vocal cords or a tongue? Was it merely an illusion created by careful coordination between magically-produced sounds and the Hat's 'mouth'? Was it actually alive? Or was it simply a clever simulation of intelligence, like a parrot that learned certain phrases which gave it the illusion of understanding? Harry had never tried giving anything life; his instincts screamed at him that it would be a Bad Idea, and Harry trusted his instincts enough that he wouldn't dare try it until he at least knew a bit more about the topic.

Besides, it wasn't like he explicitly wanted to give something life; it was more the principle of the thing, an interesting experiment. He didn't even want to go into the moral quandaries that would come with giving something life through magic; such could clearly only be a temporary acquisition, and was it murder to remove the magic from a being which subsisted on magic which was not its own?

The Hat did look rather old, though, Harry thought. How much magic did it take to make it appear alive? Perhaps it was only rarely animated? A dormant illusion of intellect?

There was one thing which bothered him about the Hat's song; this was mostly due to the particular situation he now found himself in, that of being about to partake in the Sorting.

Had it said it would be able to *see into their heads*?

McGonagall walked up next to the stool with a roll of parchment in her hands.

"When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be Sorted," she said.
"Abbott, Hannah!"

Harry wasn't really paying attention to where each student was going, too busy starting to panic a bit. Could the Hat really read his mind? His memories? Would it be able to tell if he knew Latin? What about his wandless magic? And his blood wand? And the other wand's connection to Voldemort? And the fact that he even *had* two wands? And his ability to see magic?

He took a deep breath, his eyes moving over the heads of all the other student in the hall. More importantly, would the Hat tell anyone? Did Harry have some sort of right to privacy? Were rights not a thing in the Wizarding World? Harry really hoped that rights were a thing. Rights were one of those things he liked.

He noted faintly that Draco had, as expected, been placed in Slytherin, and managed to clap for the blonde. It felt like it was much too soon when he heard "Perks, Sally-Anne" being sorted in Gryffindor, and then...

"Potter, Harry."

Abruptly, there was poignant hush from everyone in the hall. Harry carefully hid his panic, resigned to his fate, and walked out the front of the group of first years and advanced towards where Professor McGonagall held the Sorting Hat. Her expression was carefully controlled, but her magic was unsettled and choppy. Harry shot a look at Draco before sitting on the stool. He could see all eyes on him for a moment before the hat covered his sight.

"Hmm...difficult, very difficult," said a small voice, which Harry realized abruptly was speaking *inside his head*. He heard a chuckle from the mysterious voice at his clear shock.

"Do not be startled, child. I am the Sorting Hat," the voice said.

Harry swallowed thickly.

“Can you read my mind?”

“Well, of course.” The hat sounded vaguely amused. “How else would I go about this? Now...”

Harry couldn't help himself from asking quickly; “If I can hear you, does that mean I can read *your* mind?”

The hat was silent for a moment before Harry got a very distinct sense of approval which took him a moment to realize was not his own.

“That's...one way to put it,” the hat said, sounding amused.

It was silent for a small while; however, Harry could feel the hat's interest growing with every passing moment. Then the hat gave a small chuckle.

“My, my, how very interesting. It has been a while since I have seen anyone who could truly speak the Old Tongue. And your *magic*; totally wandless, how positively fascinating! My, and a blood wand...? Oh dear, don't worry, there's no need to panic; any and all things I see in a student's head are kept entirely *sub rosa*.”

The Latin words helped loosen something in Harry; his chest had closed up uncomfortably at the Hat's first observation on his magic.

“Now, where to place you? Let's see...yours is an avid, extraordinary mind which loves knowledge; you are also hard-working and disapprove of narrow-mindedness on principle. You will often place yourself in the way of danger for a cause you feel is worthy...you are also, however, an inherently practical person, avid at manipulating those around you and unafraid of long-term planning. Difficult, very difficult.” The hat gave a thoughtful hum.

“It is very rare that I find someone so suited to all the houses; the last case was about 50 years ago, if I recall correctly.” The Hat paused again and, when it continued, its voice was somehow careful. “I believe, Mr. Potter, that I must take a rather unorthodox approach towards your Sorting. As you are probably quite aware, the process is usually rather one-sided; however, for various reasons, I feel that your case requires that you make a decision regarding where you believe you should be sorted. It's nothing to be alarmed about, you are not the first to be made to decide. Now, what is your preference?”

Harry felt a frisson of unease wind through him, although the knowledge that he wasn't the only person to be asked did help calm him somewhat; he was slightly curious as to who the others were, but didn't think the Hat would tell him and he couldn't think of another way to find out.

For a moment he thought about asking to be placed in Ravenclaw; it would definitely make his life easier. Problem was, Harry wasn't sure he *wanted* easier. The hat seemed to agree with this thought, and so Harry decided to just be truthful.

“I don't really have one, to be honest; I feel it's all quite vague. I mean, I don't think I'd be a good fit for Gryffindor. I'm not particularly chivalrous or honour-bound, no matter how willing I am to mangle myself in my experiments. Hufflepuff would be alright, I expect, except that Draco would probably never talk to me again and, honestly, the only thing I'm loyal to is myself. Ravenclaw seems a good choice, but from what I've heard it seems all they *do* is read, and while I do love books and knowledge I'd go mad if I couldn't actually *apply* all I'd learned.” He shifted lightly. “Slytherin seems like it would be the best choice, except I'm not very ambitious...and it's clear I'd

be hounded at every turn for it.”

The hat was silent for a moment.

“What do you care what other people think?”

Harry frowned. “Pardon?”

The hat seemed to huff in a deliberately long-suffering manner. “You are already famous. Are you going to decide your life based on what other’s opinions of you are? You are already hiding what you think and what you can do from most people; at what point will that begin to weigh down on you, do you think? There is greatness within you, Mr. Potter, and Slytherin would help you on your way to greatness. You cannot hide forever.”

Ollivander’s words rang in his ears like a premonition, and he tried to calm his suddenly shaky hands.

The Hat’s words rang true within him; he was aware that part of him chafed at the idea that he might be limited in his intellectual pursuits by others’ opinions of him. He’d learned quickly that some people discriminated solely on the basis of what information you knew, regardless of whether you agreed with it or not. He’d had an easy time of it before Hogwarts, when no one knew who he was and no one much cared what he did; he’d had as much freedom as anyone could wish for. Now, people clearly expected things from him for something he couldn’t remember doing and probably had had no control over.

There are only two kinds of people who have the freedom to do all they will; those that have nothing, and those that need nothing. Harry had always considered himself firmly in the second group, but he was coming to the conclusion that, actually, he’d been rather more firmly in the first. As the unwanted nephew of the Dursleys, with no friends or possessions of value, he’d had nothing to lose. Now, surrounded by fascinating possibilities that Harry nonetheless suspected were privileges rather than rights – and as such could be taken away if he was found lacking – he found himself booted out of the first category. For the first time in his life, he really felt like he had something to lose; it was at once a stabilizing and enlightening thought, but that didn’t mean he had to like it.

“I have no desire to be great, or have fame or power. My greatest wish is simply to be left alone to experiment and learn as much as I can; I am probably the least ambitious person ever to step into this school.”

“Why, Mr. Potter. You are the most ambitious wizard I think I’ve ever had the pleasure of meeting.”

Harry made a disbelieving noise. “Are you not *listening* to me? I just –”

“Your ambition is, however, unlike most others,” the Hat interrupted cleanly. “It is the purest kind, the rarest and most powerful.”

Harry blinked in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“That is not for me to tell you, but for you to find out.” Harry frowned at the hat’s confusing words and useless answer, feeling as if he was being left in that dark from important information, something he’d never liked feeling. “Now, where will you go?”

“You are the Sorting Hat, are you not? You asked for my opinion, and I gave you it. Now place me as you see fit,” he snapped, trying to contain his frustration with his situation and failing. He could

feel a vague sense of panic unfurling in his gut at the hat's impending decision.

The hat chuckled lightly, apparently not insulted at his surly response. "I am indeed the Sorting Hat," he said, "and as such, I place you in...SLYTHERIN!"

Harry hadn't thought it was possible for the Hall to get quieter than it had when his name had first been called, but he was obviously wrong. The very air seemed to vibrate with the sudden stillness that permeated the Great Hall, from the grand doors to the back, where all the teachers sat.

Harry stood carefully, taking the hat off his head and passing it to McGonagall, who looked like she was about to faint, her face pale and her eyes wide. Harry turned to the Slytherin table and slowly began walking towards it in the utter, tomb-like silence, carefully keeping his hands from shaking too obviously. He really didn't like being the center of attention.

Suddenly, there was a single clapping sound. Harry looked around and saw Draco was slowly clapping for him as he walked over to the table. A few moments later other people started joining in, until eventually by the time he sat down next to his blonde friend most of the Hall was clapping, if in a much more subdued manner than for all the previous first years. Some students, however, were shooting angry or shocked looks in his direction, which Harry ignored. He nodded his sincere thanks to Draco, who nodded back in understanding. He then turned back to the Head Table.

His eyes immediately narrowed back onto the dark-haired teacher. The man's magic was even more agitated than it had been before, snapping about in a vaguely threatening manner. His dark eyes swept over the Slytherin table, landing on Harry's for a moment; Harry blinked, and the teacher's gaze swept past him. Harry turned to Draco.

"Who's the Professor with dark hair sitting next to the one with the turban?"

Draco looked over. "Oh, that's Severus Snape, my Godfather. He doesn't look very happy right now; I guess he mustn't be too pleased, he's never liked these ceremonies much." Harry refrained from telling him he suspected Snape didn't seem like he liked Harry much, either. "We might get to meet him properly when we go down to the Common Room. I'm pleased you're in Slytherin with me; I know you said you weren't sure, but I'm glad." The blonde smiled lightly and Harry smiled back, feeling affection running through him at Draco's blunt words.

"Well, I'm glad to be here with you, as well," he said softly. Draco's smile widened, before abruptly falling off as he turned a cold glare at someone behind Harry.

"Would you mind not eavesdropping on our conversation? Such rude behavior should be beneath any person with proper manners. Perhaps you would feel more at home with the Gryffindors," he said, his tone icy and making perfectly clear how pathetic he found the other Slytherins' attempts at subtlety. Harry turned to see a group of other students turning quickly away from them looking fairly chastised, a couple burning red from shame. He smiled lightly as he turned back to Draco. He really did like the blonde.

The feast ended rather soon, in Harry's opinion; there were just so many things to take in! He marveled at the blatant displays of magic all around him; he was so used to magic being something he had to hide from everyone, a small thing he kept to quiet afternoons and secretive experiments,

that seeing it shown-off so brazenly was rather refreshing. The Hat had been taken away by McGonagall soon after the last student was sorted. Harry resolved to find out what he could about it; it had certainly *seemed* very much alive.

He hadn't spoken very much to the other students, although a few had attempted to draw him into conversation; he let Draco do most of the talking for him, the pure-blood perfectly happy to make their friendship clear to all those around them. Harry knew Draco was making some sort of power-play by flaunting his connection to the 'celebrated war-hero', although he couldn't exactly see what it was. Probably just laying the foundation for future plans, Harry thought fondly; how like his father.

They were led out of the Great Hall by two older students; Harry and Draco walked side-by-side, Draco telling Harry all he knew about Hogwarts.

"We'll be in the dungeons, of course," he said. Harry looked at him with surprise. "Not like that; Slytherins have their dormitories in the dungeons...oh honestly, it's not what it sounds like! My father's told me our accommodations are the best of the lot; there's a lot more space down here than in the towers, for one thing, so all our rooms are larger. We also have enchanted windows which usually show the Great Lake, but which you can enchant to basically anything. There's also..."

The walk down took about 10 minutes; Harry rather thought he would have gotten dreadfully lost in the first two. The castle was *huge*, with winding corridors and nondescript walls...and the moving staircases and vanishing doors didn't help.

They stopped in front of a large statue of a snake; the prefect turned back to look at them.

"This is the entrance to your Dorms. You need a password to enter so don't forget it or you'll be locked out. The password changes every month. The current one is *Semper Purum*."

Harry grinned. Finally proof that Latin existed in the Wizarding world! Even if the prefect *had* mangled the pronunciation...

The snake statue made a small sound, and then moved sideways, revealing a dark passage which disappeared into the walls of the castle.

They all walked in through a rather narrow passage before coming out the other side to the view of a vast, magnificent room. Drapes with silver linings hung around the room, various silver adornments placed with care on splendidly crafted tables. There were various exquisite paintings placed strategically around the room, and armchairs situated in a tasteful arrangement, a cluster formed around a grand fire-place which warmed the otherwise cold stone walls. Above them hung a beautiful glass chandelier, lined with candles which Harry would bet were carefully carved into some kind of elegant shape. It was an absolutely stunning sight, and Harry had to once again swallow his shock at the unexpected grandeur of his new life. It was *nothing* like what he could have ever imagined. He could see even Draco looking fairly awed.

The prefect allowed them a few moments of reverent silence before clearing his throat lightly.

"You may admire the Common Room as much as you wish later; now, the boys' rooms are up the left staircase, girls' on the right. Your trunks are lined along the corridors at the top; as first years, you will all room in pairs. You may decide your sleeping arrangements amongst yourselves. For those of you who brought owls, they had been taken up to the owlery; you may visit them when you wish. Now, breakfast tomorrow is at 7 am. You are all expected to be there on time, especially since tomorrow is the first day. You'll get your schedules then. Any questions?" No one said

anything. "Good. My name is Gerard Pritchard. Welcome to Slytherin." With that, he turned and walked off into one of the various corridors that led further into the Slytherin dorms.

No one moved. Harry looked after him for a moment before turning to Draco.

"Let's go grab a room," he said. Draco nodded, and they went up the stair-case to the corridor where their rooms were, the other boys coming along behind them. They moved in to the room closest to the stairs; it offered less privacy, but Harry judged it more important to have clear access to and from the Common Room. In any case, spells could be placed to prevent anyone uninvited from entering and snooping around. Draco didn't question his choice, but Harry suspected the blonde was having similar thoughts.

None of the other students questioned their choice; Harry wondered if it was because of who he and Draco were, or simply because they'd gotten there first. Probably a combination of the two.

The rooms were much less lavish than the Common Room, although they were by no means shabby. There were two full beds, with deep-green covers and hangings which had elegant silver designs traced on them; two small tables and two desks, both intricately carved, and a door which Harry quickly discovered led to a rather large bathroom. They had one medium-sized window, which displayed a rather amazing view of the night-sky, as if they were in the highest tower of the castle rather than under the Lake.

Harry absolutely loved it all.

A part of him wanted to go back down and explore the Common Room further, perhaps simply stare at its beauty for a few minutes, but he eventually decided he was rather exhausted. Draco agreed that it would be better to sleep in earlier today; they'd have plenty of time to admire their living arrangements later, and it was important to give a good first impression tomorrow. They got ready for bed and within moments of laying down on his bed --which was, amazingly, even more comfortable than it looked-- Harry had fallen fast asleep.

Vindictis

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry awoke the next morning with a vague sense of disorientation. It took him a few moments to remember he was no longer in his room at the Leaky Cauldron, but instead his lavish Slytherin quarters.

“*Tempus*”, he murmured groggily, and immediately got the distinct sense that it was 6:04 in the morning. He sat up, rubbing tiredly at his eyes, and then went to his trunk to retrieve his clothes before slipping into the bathroom for a morning shower. 10 minutes later he was sitting back on his bed, dressed but barefoot, browsing over *Customs and Traditions*. He was determined to make a good first impression on the other children, and he didn’t want to either rely on or become a liability in any way to Draco.

At around 6:20 he heard shuffling from Draco’s bed, and a few minutes later the blond sat up on his bed, looking drowsy. Harry gave him a cheery smile when the boy turned to look at him. Draco groaned.

“Oh Merlin, you’re one of those morning people, aren’t you?”

Harry chuckled at the blonde’s surly tone, turning back to his book as Draco went about his morning routine.

They got to the Great Hall a few minutes before 7 after having gotten lost twice. Harry noted with amusement that Slytherin table was by far the one with most students, and in fact he and Draco were the only first-years there yet.

The rest of the Slytherin first-years trickled in slowly, and Harry noticed how a few of them nodded in acknowledgement of each other, before taking their seats in a manner which seemed to Harry too orderly to be random. He suspected they were all already acquainted with each other, probably all Purebloods, as Slytherin was known for. He’d gotten the same impression yesterday, but he’d been too distracted by the day’s events to make any attempt at socializing. He wasn’t exactly looking forwards to it all, but accepted that it was a necessary aspect of being a proper Lord. He wasn’t even going to touch the whole “Boy-Who-Lived” thing; the idea of being a ‘celebrity’ honestly made him vaguely nauseous. He was determined to as soon as possible disabuse any and all of his peers of the notion that what he’d done 10 years previous in any way affected his current life and choices. The girl who’d sat next to Draco immediately drew Draco into a conversation, which Harry ignored in favor of his cup of tea. Harry had also read that until either Draco introduced him or one of the others made to introduce themselves to him, it would be seen as poor manners for Harry to join a conversation suddenly.

After a few minutes of silence, the boy who’d sat next to Harry turned to him.

“Blaise Zabini,” he said after a moment. His voice was soft, his expression somewhat sleepy except his eyes were sharp as a blade. He had dark skin and even darker hair; his eyes were a light green hue that bordered on grey, framed by long, dark lashes, and Harry’s first thought was that he was beautiful.

“Harry Potter,” he responded lightly as was the standard pureblood greeting, meeting Zabini’s eyes straight on. He didn’t know what it was, but something about Zabini made the hair on the back of

his neck prickle. Zabini's magic was carefully controlled, giving no indication of how the boy was feeling apart from the clear tenseness. After a few moments, Zabini nodded as if acquiescing, before turning back to his breakfast. Harry turned back to his own plate, thankful that he'd managed to at least gain Zabini's approval.

Halfway through breakfast their schedules appeared suddenly beside their plates, and Harry noted that Slytherins had Charms as their first class that day, followed by Potions in the afternoon.

By the time breakfast was finished, Draco was starting to look more like himself. As they walked over to Charms, Draco formally introduced him to some of the other first-year Slytherins, while also surreptitiously giving him a very quick background run on them. They all accepted Harry without hesitation, and he wondered fleetingly if this was because he was a Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived, Draco's friend, or all of the above.

"The Parkinsons are rather powerful, although obviously nowhere near us Malfoys," Draco stated, gesturing towards Pansy Parkinson. "They are well-respected, relatively influential purebloods. I've known Pansy since we were children, so I understand her quite well. She's a great ally to have. She's good at information gathering, and quite vicious when she wants to be. She might come across as a bit of a gossip, but you definitely don't want to get on her bad side, believe me." He sounded like he spoke from experience, and Harry believed him.

"Crabbe and Goyle are effectively my bodyguards; our families are connected such that they practically serve us and we provide them with protection and a certain amount of influence." Harry turned to look at the two lumbering boys who had been following Draco around since yesterday. They didn't seem particularly clever or intelligent, but Harry supposed their loyalty made up for it. "Those two are certainly not the sharpest, but they serve intimidation purposes, if nothing else. As long as I consider you my ally, they will remain loyal to you as well. They are like pets, really," he stated, sounding rather condescending.

"That is Blaise Zabini," he then said, gesturing towards the other boy. "His mother has had seven husbands, all rumored to have died mysterious deaths. They have quite a bit of money, most inherited from the aforementioned husbands, but are not particularly influential as they have mostly kept out of society. Not much is publicly known about them, other than that they were neutral in the last war. Blaise himself is rather sharp; very quiet, very observant. His loyalties are...questionable." His expression twisted slightly at the word, looking almost sad, but he quickly shifted out of it and Harry wasn't even sure he'd seen the change. He wondered what that meant.

Harry absorbed Draco's observations, filing away the commentary. Draco's statement on Zabini's side in the war seemed somehow odd to Harry; he had assumed, for reasons that he could not now properly identify, that the people around him had all fought against the 'Dark Lord'. Now, as he looked around him at the Slytherins, at Draco, he suddenly wondered at the validity of that belief. Of course, none of them had outright stated they were Dark wizards; Draco had in fact expressed a certain amount of skepticism towards the idea, which Harry was relatively certain was genuine. That didn't mean they didn't have certain sides in the previous war; 'Dark Lord' was just a title after all. Harry made a careful note to read about the war and this Dark Lord he'd supposedly defeated.

They arrived to their first class, Charms, and took their seats in the left side of the classroom opposite the group of Ravenclaw first years they would be sharing with. Their teacher, Professor Flitwick, entered the classroom a few moments later; he was a tiny little wizard who had to stand on a pile of books to see over his desk. Once everyone was seated and no one else seemed to be coming he took the roll call, and when he reached Harry's name he gave an excited squeak and toppled out of sight. Harry felt himself flush slightly as the Ravenclaws all suddenly turned to look

at him .

“I will be demonstrating the levitation charm today, although you will not be casting it yet. That will be in a few classes, once we have the motion and the words down properly. Everyone take out your wands and follow my lead!”

Harry took out his holly wand, doing his best to ignore the odd feeling the wand gave him. He hoped that with enough use his magic would either accept it or he’d grow used to the feeling. It was really quite distracting.

Flitwick made a strange motion with his wand, as if he were a composer.

“Now, the spell for this is ‘*Wingardium Leviosa*’.”

Harry nearly choked on air. *Wing-what? That wasn’t Latin! What even was that?!* He stared at the Professor, who repeated the words a few more times, just so Harry could be sure he hadn’t just misheard. Then he proceeded to point his wand at a feather on his desk, say the words – *which were NOT LATIN* – and, despite Harry’s absolute disbelief that it could possibly work, it lifted off the desk and proceeded to dance around the room.

Some of the students around Harry watched the feather with nothing short of amazement; Harry noted these were probably the Muggleborns, as obviously those students who had grown up with Wizards would find the display inconsequential. None of the Slytherins seemed particularly impressed, although some looked eager to try it out for themselves.

Harry, however, could barely contain his frustration. That was definitely not Latin, and he would eat his own tongue if it was any other language than *pure rubbish*. He couldn’t explain why, but it felt like the words were taunting his beloved Latin, somehow ridiculing its beauty with these stupid words which seemed to think they could pass as the marvelous Old Tongue.

Harry wouldn’t stand for it, and he pushed his magic at the feather, which Flitwick was still waving about, and hissed under his breath, “*Volito*.”

Immediately, the feather began to flutter about in a much more active manner than before, flying all around the room, slapping some of the students lightly in the face and causing some of them to sneeze. Flitwick seemed stunned for a moment before he smiled and clapped his hand. “Why, how marvelous that one of you can already do it! Who has performed the spell so well?”

No one raised their hands, and Flitwick looked around, still smiling.

“Now, now, no need to be shy! 10 points to whoever is doing this!”

Still no one raised their hands, and Flitwick frowned slightly, turning to look towards the feather which darted quickly this way and that as various students attempted to catch it.

“No one? Really? Hmm...Peeves, is it you? Come out Peeves!”

No one answered, and Flitwick turned back to the students. Harry brought the feather out in front of Flitwick’s face and then poked him in the nose. Flitwick gave a small splutter, bringing his hands up to his face and smacking the feather away. The movement caused him to lose his balance and topple out of sight once again. The other students burst out laughing, and Harry took advantage of the distraction and returned the feather to Flitwick’s desk.

The Professor managed to after a moment clamber back onto his books, calling on the students to settle down.

“Well, that was quite something!” Harry thought Flitwick might perhaps be angry, but the short wizard looked almost thrilled instead. “Truly quite impressive magic! Marvelous control, for sure. Now, now, who of you managed to do this? I know it wasn’t Peeves, his magic doesn’t feel like this.”

Harry’s eyes widened before he berated himself mentally. Of course he wasn’t the only magic sensitive around! Lucius had clearly been able to sense Ollivander’s oddity, it wouldn’t be so strange to suppose one of his teachers here in Hogwarts, allegedly one of the best magical schools in Europe, would have some sense of what other’s magic felt like.

Harry focused on Flitwick’s magic. It wasn’t anywhere near as powerful as Lucius’, or even McGonagall’s, but there was a definite sense of awareness about it that immediately called Harry’s attention.

Flitwick made a few more attempts to coax out the perpetrator, but after even with a 50 House Point bribe no one volunteered, he gave up. Harry supposed none of the Ravenclaws would even dare to try without first having grasped the logic behind the spell, and none of the Slytherins were willing to make fools of themselves when Flitwick indubitably demanded proof of their claim. Harry himself wasn’t sure if he would even be able to cast the spell through the wand at all, with the designated words; he honestly didn’t really want to, either, and decided to later practice casting a spell so that it at least *appeared* to have been cast through his wand. He wasn’t sure what he was going to do with the words yet. He straight up *refused* to speak that nonsense.

Eventually, Flitwick dismissed the incident as “one of the many odd things you will see here at Hogwarts, class, I myself am constantly surprised!”, and Harry gave out a sigh of relief. Clearly, while Flitwick too could detect magic, he was incapable of following it back to the source. Perhaps he could only sense it when it was very close? Physically touching? Harry would have to be wary around him.

Half of the remaining class was spent learning the motions for the spell, with the remaining half having Flitwick explaining its various uses and limitations. Harry had to contain a flinch every time the words were mentioned, and by the end of the class he was ready to mutilate whoever it was that had made up that *stupid mixture of idiotic syllables*.

The class exited chattering excitedly about the Feather Incident, as they had taken to calling it, wondering on whether it had been a ghost or the mysterious ‘Peeves’. They had been watching the feather carefully for the duration, but it hadn’t twitched again. Some students thought it had been a ploy by Flitwick to get them excited about the spell.

Draco quickly noticed his foul mood as Harry remained relatively sullen on their walk to lunch. The other Slytherins walked on ahead as they hung back.

“What’s wrong?”

“What do you mean?” Harry snapped back. Draco scowled.

“Don’t take that tone with me, Potter. I am expressing my *concern*. You should be honoured.”

Harry snorted, before frowning once again. “It’s nothing. It’s just so *stupid*.”

“*What* is, Potter?” Draco asked, crossing his arms and shooting him an exasperated look.

“*Wingardium Leviosa!* What in the nine layers of Hell does that even mean?! It’s not a word! It’s just...just *gibberish*!”

Draco looked taken aback by Harry's sudden outburst. A few of the slower Ravenclaw students shot them curious looks; Draco glared at them and they hurried off. Draco turned back to Harry, giving him a somewhat confused look.

"It's just a spell. I don't think they are supposed to mean anything, not independently of the ritual to cast the spell itself."

Harry scowled, but before he could snap again at the blonde a horrifying thought entered his head. What if 'proper spells' weren't in Latin? He had no guarantee on it, and in fact had merely assumed that just because *his* magic worked with his beloved language, so did all others. No one had ever stated that Latin was the basis for their spells, not really. It had all just seemed so obvious.

"Potter? Harry? Are you alright?"

"...What ritual?"

Draco blinked. "The wand-waving and words? They are a ritual to cast the spell; a very short one, sure, but that's only because the actual real ritual was designed to have the short-cut. Otherwise casting magic would be very time-consuming and not practical at all."

"Huh. That makes sense." *Didn't mean the words were any less insulting, though.*

"Of course it does," the blonde stated haughtily. "We have quite a few books on the subject in my family's library; I've only read enough to get a basic grasp on the general principles, but I can lend you some if you want. You should also check out the school's library. I'm sure they have some books here as well, although obviously not as useful as the ones I have."

Harry couldn't help the rush of gleeful anticipation at the looming prospect of being able to browse the fabled Hogwarts library, and he shot the blonde a fond, thankful look. Draco's pureblood mask cracked at that and he responded with a wide, childish grin.

"That would be fantastic, Draco. And you're right, I should." Harry said, cheerfully. The promise of more knowledge set Harry at ease once again; perhaps there was some logic to the whole debacle after all.

Lunch was a relaxed affair. Zabini sat next to Harry again, and by now he was sure the seating arrangements were pre-arranged. They didn't speak, although Zabini seemed to be aware of him all through the meal. His magic at times seemed eager to reach out, but would always pull back when it got too near Harry's own. Harry didn't really know what to make of it, but even though it put him slightly on edge he couldn't feel any hostility from Zabini, and so was content to allow the current state of affairs. Draco's comments on the boy flitted through the back of his mind. Beside him, Draco prattled on about Potions. Harry listened to him, content to allow the blonde to fill the silence. By now he was beginning to realize that Draco *really* liked talking, a feature of the boy that Harry was more than fine with; as long as he hummed in agreement or nodded every once in a while, Draco could talk and talk and talk. Harry didn't even really have to pay attention, although what the blonde said usually was interesting enough to warrant it. It was mostly when he began to talk about gossip that Harry tended to tune him out. Parkinson was more than happy to contribute at that point, and so Harry didn't feel guilty at turning his attention elsewhere. He still picked up on some of it, though. Who knew when knowledge on the other students would come in handy.

They walked back down to the dungeons for Potions; Harry still hadn't gotten a good grasp of the place, but Zabini seemed to know exactly where he was going, so Harry and Draco followed him all the way down. He wasn't too worried about ever getting *too* lost; after all, he could always use his magic to point out the correct direction, but he'd rather utilize that technique only as a last resort. By following the dark-haired boy, they didn't get lost once. Harry was honestly quite impressed.

They entered the classroom quickly and quietly, Harry sitting between Draco and Zabini at one of the tables nearest the front. They shared this class with the Gryffindors, and Harry noted with some amusement that there was a very clear division down the center of the class between the two Houses. He was less amused by how most of the Gryffindors seemed to be looking at him and muttering in hushed whispers. He hunched slightly into himself, not liking the attention at all.

He noticed belatedly how Snape stood silently in the front of the classroom, eerily reminiscent of a dark gargoyle as he observed all the students. Harry allowed himself a few moments to once again admire the man's magic, which snapped about with all the deadly grace of a furious python.

Like Flitwick, Snape began the class by taking roll call. He hesitated minutely at Harry's name, pronouncing his last name like he found it personally distasteful, but then continued going. Harry didn't know what to think of this; it was clear the man disliked him but, until he made any overt moves Harry couldn't bring himself to worry overly about it. Perhaps it was simply his imagination. Draco's magic vibrated with excitement next to him, even as his expression remained coldly aloof, and Harry had to admit that he was also excited for his very first Potions class. Eventually, Snape came up to the front of the class to stand imposingly in front of the first-years.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion-making," he began. He spoke in barely more than a whisper, but with the class a silent as it was they caught every word. "As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses.... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death – if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach."

Even as he finished the speech, Harry couldn't help but nod along. He didn't approve of the dependence wizards had apparently developed on wands, even if he understood objectively why it had; he viewed it as laziness to the core, and could fully appreciate Snape's point of view on the matter. His own attempts at potion's brewing while at the Leaky Cauldron had met with relative success, but he was eager to see what techniques Snape – a well-renowned Potions Master, after all – could impart to him.

"Potter!" said Snape suddenly. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

In his peripheral vision, Harry could see a hand shoot up in the air, but he paid it no mind. He wasn't exactly prepared for the sudden question, but he quickly gathered his bearings.

"Well, sir, asphodel usually would react with wormwood as a mild depressant, which has its uses in various medicines. But, if you *powder* the *root*..." he paused, uncertain. He was sure he'd read about this. "Pure Wormwood tends to react too powerfully with powdered materials, but an infusion should stabilize it...forming a potion which would inhibit reactions and cause drowsiness much more strongly; essentially almost fully depressing a person's central nervous system. So... probably a very potent sleeping draught of some sort?" he said, looking up at Snape as he concluded.

Snape looked like he'd been slapped, a look which Harry was starting to find depressingly familiar on most adults. After a moment, Snape nodded, although it looked like it hurt him to do so.

"Correct, Potter." The words seemed to pain him, drawn out reluctantly in a tone that gave the impression that Snape couldn't believe he was saying them at all. "Powdered root of asphodel and wormwood make a sleeping potion so powerful it is known as the Drought of Living Death."

He then came to stand closer to Harry, peering into his eyes with his own black ones with a calculating glare. Harry looked straight back. "I am curious as to where you came to know of the more...delicate qualities of asphodel and wormwood." He didn't seem angry, but his expression was now carefully guarded, less clear in expressing the strong dislike from before. His magic had gone strangely still during Harry's explanation, but had now resumed its dance, if in a slightly more subdued, precise manner, and Harry got the distinct feeling that the man was controlling some sort of instinctive reaction.

He cocked his head lightly. "I read it in *Potions Theory; Fauna and Flora*. It discusses various uses and qualities of the most common plants used in potions, among other things, as well as their various types and methods of application."

Snape's lip curled slightly, in a smile or a grimace Harry was not sure. "I have read the book myself, Mr. Potter. I know what it says," he said softly. Harry nodded, and something in Snape's magic seemed to soften from its sharp dance. "It contains much useful information; you would do well to learn all you can from it."

"I am trying, Sir," Harry said. Snape nodded once more before suddenly scowling fiercely, and then turned back to the rest of the class, who were watching the exchange in stunned silence.

"Longbottom! Where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

Harry turned to see who it was that Snape had singled out; the boy was chubby and not particularly bright-looking, and seemed like he was about to cry.

"I...I don't know sir," he answered after a few moments of soundless blubbering. Draco sent the boy a disgusted glare, a sentiment which Zabini seemed to share if the sharp twist in his lips was any indication.

Snape scoffed rather contemptuously.

"Clearly. Anyone else?"

The same hand from before shot up once again, and Harry noted it belonged to a bushy-haired girl who was sitting alone. Snape, however, ignored her. After a moment, Draco raised his hand.

"Yes, Mr. Malfoy?"

"In the stomach of a goat, sir."

Snape nodded. "Quite. 5 points for Slytherin."

Harry frowned. Hadn't he deserved some points too?

Snape turned and gestured to the board, where he'd written down instructions.

"This is a simple potion to cure boils. Get into pairs and try not to blow yourselves up. We have an uneven number of students, however, so one of you will have to be alone."

Harry immediately volunteered; he wanted to try out a few techniques he'd read about, and a partner would only get in the way. Besides, Harry was used to working alone. Snape shot him a suspicious glare but allowed it. Draco looked at him curiously, but at Harry's flippant wave shrugged arrogantly, as if he were the one dismissing Harry, and promptly partnered with Zabini.

Harry immediately began planning how best to go about preparing the potions ingredients for a more efficient potion. Textbook recipes were all well and good, but Borage had been adamant in his belief that most potions were taught in a rather time-consuming and ultimately wasteful fashion, sacrificing efficiency for simplicity, but Harry was nothing if not efficient. He was still slightly cautious at messing about with potions, even after having already experimented some, but felt confident enough in his ability to at least attempt a few minor adjustments.

He did, however, want to make sure that it wouldn't all get him into trouble with Snape.

"Professor?" he asked quietly. Snape shot him an irritated look before stalking over.

"What is it, Potter? Surely you haven't yet managed to ruin your potion?"

Harry bit back his annoyance. He had no idea why Snape disliked him so, but he would *not stand* for being considered *incompetent*.

"No, sir. I was wondering if it would be ok for me to attempt a few adjustments to the instructions on the board. For a better potion."

Snape looked surprised for a moment before sneering at him.

"And how, Potter, do you think you could improve upon this potion?" His voice was bitingly sarcastic, but his magic had gone tellingly still.

"Well, crushing the newt's eyes instead of dicing them would release the juice more effectively, so I'd only have to simmer the cauldron for 2 minutes instead of 7," Harry said carefully; he'd tried that technique before, and it had worked quite well. Snape's expression had once again gone flat, but his magic was still oddly *expectant*, so Harry continued. "And if I added two of the beetles *after* I added the borage stems – obviously while continually stirring counterclockwise – they would react better with the Afanc hair, wouldn't they?" He wasn't as sure about this suggestion, but that was why he was asking Snape before attempting it himself. Usually he'd just go ahead and see what happened, but given that this all now counted towards a *grade* – and how that notion still unsettled something inside him – he opted for a safer option.

Snape stayed quiet for a few moments, simply looking at Harry. Harry noted that a few of the other students were looking at them curiously; Draco appeared slightly concerned, and even a few of the Gryffindors were shooting him pitying looks, no doubt thinking he was in trouble.

"Try adding three of the beetles after the borage, but lowering the heat slightly. The potion should turn a bright red momentarily, before turning royal purple instead of lilac. It should be ready much sooner," he said finally. He was scowling again, but his tone lacked the hard edge from before and his eyes were measuring him carefully. Harry nodded, taking note of Snape's advice.

"I'll do that, sir. Thank you."

Snape nodded before scowling again, irritation flashing across his features, and then turning to the rest of the class. Harry grinned slightly; that had gone well!

By the time Harry began preparing his potion, everyone else had already started; even so, Harry still finished long before any of the others. He'd followed Snape's advice, and his potion had

indeed flashed bright red before settling into royal purple. Snape came up to him and peered into his cauldron.

“...adequate, Potter,” he said after a few seconds, and Harry thought that, this time perhaps, Snape didn’t sound quite as upset about admitting Harry’s success. He didn’t sound *happy* either, but Harry wasn’t hoping for miracles. “Bottle it up and place it on my desk, labeled with your name. Try to see if some of your classmates could use your help; I believe Mr. Goyle and Mr. Crabbe would benefit particularly.”

Harry nodded, taking the reluctant praise for what it was as Snape stalked off once again. He bottled up his potion and, after labeling it with his name, placed it on Snape’s desk. He then went over to where Goyle and Crabbe were standing next to a cauldron that shone a bright yellow. Harry grimaced.

“Oh, hell. Have you added the borage stems yet? How long has it been since you added the beetles?”

Goyle looked at him stupidly before shaking his head. Crabbe looked even more lost. Harry sighed; they certainly were like pets.

“Never mind that, I’ll take care of it. Move over.”

Harry spent the rest of the class trying to fix Crabbe and Goyle’s potion. He didn’t really mind that the pair eventually gave up trying to help and simply stood next to him without saying anything or doing any work; they were honestly more of a liability than anything. It also allowed him to mess about with a few of the ingredients while he was at it; the potion was already ruined, and Harry had his own already finished. He would certainly *try* to help, but if he didn’t do everything correctly the worst that would happen was that the potion would stay ruined. Snape circled the group a few times but said nothing, quietly observing Harry work before moving on to snap at the Gryffindors.

He didn’t manage to save it completely, but at least by the end of the class it was an exceedingly light pinkish color, as opposed to the fluorescent yellow it had been when he’d first seen it. It certainly wouldn’t cure any boils, but Harry was relatively certain it would help soothe a sunburn.

He bottled the potion and took it to Snape, placing it with the other potions on his desk. Snape raised an eyebrow at him.

“What is this, Potter?”

“Sorry, sir, but it was unsalvageable by the time I got there,” Harry said. He noted with some satisfaction that it was by far not the worst-looking potion. Davis and Bulstrode had somehow managed to end up with a puke-green potion, and Weasley and Finnigan’s was a dull, sickly-looking orange. The best-looking one was Draco and Zabini’s. It looked as Harry would have expected his to, except his potion was royal purple and Harry had no real idea if he’d done it right given the shifted goal. He certainly hoped he had. If nothing else, he’d quite enjoyed the entire process, including his attempts at adjusting the instructions. Although, to be honest, he’d had more fun with Crabbe’s and Goyle’s potion; the pair had no real idea what they’d put in the cauldron and so Harry had had to assume from what ingredients were missing what section of the instructions the pair had already attempted. Granger and Longbottom had a decent potion, but Harry suspected it was entirely thanks to Granger that it didn’t look like Davis and Bulstrode’s; Longbottom clearly was much too terrified of Snape to be of any use in the class. Every time the Professor had gotten near the pair the boy had looked as if he was about to faint. Harry would have found it funny if it wasn’t so utterly pathetic.

The other students filed out of the class, but Harry hung back, wanting to ask Snape if he could recommend any other Potions books and if he could explain his suggestion with the beetles. Harry strongly disliked not understanding theories. Draco came up to him.

“Let’s go to the Common Room.”

“I’ll go back in a moment. I want to ask Professor Snape something.”

Draco nodded. “Alright. I’ll meet you there. Don’t get lost on the way back, I don’t want to have to look for you,” he claimed haughtily.

Harry smiled mockingly at him. “How kind of you to worry over me, Draco!”

Draco glared at him, but he was grinning as well so Harry merely waved him off as he left the classroom with the rest of the Slytherins. Some of the Gryffindors shot him somewhat curious looks as they left, and Harry noted that the red-head boy looked at him with some hostility. The bushy-haired girl, Granger, gave him a calculating look before also exiting, finally leaving Harry and Snape alone in the class. Snape was peering at the light pinkish potion with a curious look on his face, shooting considering looks at Harry’s own purple one.

Harry opened his mouth to ask Snape about the books, but Snape raised a hand and Harry closed his mouth.

“How long have you been studying Potions, Potter?”

“A few weeks? Probably around a month.”

Snape’s expression turned incredulous, before he scowled. “There’s no way you could have done this with merely a month’s worth of studying, Potter. Tell me the truth. Have you had tutors?”

Harry looked at him with confusion, gripping his bag nervously. “No sir. I’m not lying. I’ve read over half the Potions text for this class, as well as *Extended Theory of Potion-Making* and quite a bit of the *Fauna and Flora* book I told you about. That’s all.”

Snape’s scowl seemed to fall off his face in a manner which would have been rather comical had Harry not felt quite so confused over why Snape seemed determined not to believe him.

“That’s all.” Snape’s voice was flat and slightly sarcastic.

“Yes, Sir. That’s all.”

Snape gave a deep sigh.

“Very well, Potter. Say I believe you. Where have you been learning to brew, then? Some of those chopping and stirring motions can only be learned through experience.”

“I’ve been trying some of the potions on Borage’s book. I didn’t think I’ve yet got quite the muscle memory needed for proper motions yet, though.”

Snape nodded. “No, not yet. But I feel you may eventually.” He picked up Harry’s potion and peered into the glass carefully once again. “Which Potions have you made already?”

“I’ve mostly stuck to three, and made those over a few times until I was sure I got them right. A light Sleeping Draught, a Nutrient Broth and Sylphs’ Muscle Relaxant.” He grimaced. “That last one is total pain to make, very ironically appropriate.”

Snape's lips quirked slightly in what Harry thought might be amusement. "It certainly is." Then he glared again at Harry. Harry was honestly starting to find it sort of funny how Snape was so determined to keep disliking him when he so clearly approved of Harry's interest in potions. It reminded him slightly of Sandy, and how she'd always approved of his academic pursuits above everything else. He was intensely curious, however, about just *why* Snape was so stubborn about disliking him. He was certain he'd never met the man before coming to Hogwarts.

Snape cleared his throat. "Well, Potter, you'd best get going. You may not have any homework yet, but I have classes to prepare."

Harry nodded, then walked over towards the door of the classroom. As he was about to leave, Snape spoke.

"Oh, and Potter? 20 Points to Slytherin for being quite an acceptable student."

Harry couldn't stop smiling all the way back to the Common Room.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading :D

Morbus

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry arrived quickly at the statue of the large serpent which was the entrance to the Common Room, still smiling slightly; Snape's parting words had put him in a decidedly good mood. The corridor was empty around him.

“*Semper Purum*,” he said.

Nothing happened for a moment, but then suddenly the snake spoke.

§*Welcome* §

Then the statue moved sideways, revealing the entrance to the Common Room. Harry peered at the snake curiously for a moment before entering the room. So the statues could talk; he wondered how many other students were aware of this, and if this would perhaps aid in any sort of spying. To be fair he wasn't sure the statue could really talk at all. Perhaps they only had pre-programmed messages installed, such as 'Welcome'. He'd have to check later.

Draco looked up at him as he entered from where he was sitting on one of the lavish armchairs by the fire, flanked by Parkinson, Crabbe and Goyle. There were a few older Slytherins also sitting about, a few of them working on homework or reading, while others conversed. Harry noted with interest that while there was no clear division, there were almost certainly a few defined groups which the rest of the students seemed to be hyper-aware of. Draco's group was one of those; regardless of the fact that they were all first-years, they were heirs to powerful families and so would almost automatically be high on the Slytherin hierarchy. If there was one thing which was clear to Harry, it was the Slytherins valued power in whatever form they found it.

Harry slipped in, largely unnoticed, and walked over to Draco's group, sitting on the empty couch to the right of the blonde. He could see a few faces glancing his way, judging how involved he already was with one of the central groups. Harry paid them no heed; while he accepted the importance of maintaining a relatively high position, he had no intention of getting dragged into the more complicated side of school politics. There was a reason he very rarely socialized.

“What did you want to ask Snape?”

Harry frowned before sighing.

“I forgot about that. I'll have to ask him some other time. When is our next Potions class?”

“Friday we have double Potions.”

“Good, that will be a nice way to end the week,” Harry said, grinning. Draco chuckled.

“See, I knew you'd like Potions. It's great, isn't it?”

“Absolutely,” Harry replied. Today had been a lot of fun; he'd been quite nervous about his first day, but apparently his fears had been for naught.

They talked for a while, Harry telling Draco about his potions experiments while Pansy walked off to talk to one of the other first-year Slytherin girls, Daphne Greengrass. After a while, Zabini came

down from where their dorms were located, coming to sit at the other side of the couch Harry was on and settling in quietly to read a book.

Dinner passed quickly; Harry couldn't keep his eyes from drifting over both Snape and Dumbledore's magic at the head table. Dumbledore's was especially arresting in its unadorned magnificence; there was quite simply a whole *lot* of magic surrounding the man, lively and pulsing with strength, and Harry couldn't help a pang of awe at the wizard's obvious power. Meanwhile, Snape's magic was less obviously *powerful*, but no less imposing for it.

Having the two wizards together, Harry took a moment to catalogue their differences. It would be interesting to know what he could figure out from a wizard's magic apart from their emotions. He'd done quite a bit of people-watching during his stay at Diagon Alley, but most wizards' and witches' magic was too feeble to properly appreciate their subtleties and nuances. He suspected that had to do with power level, although the idea had occurred to him that hiding one's magic might be possible. He needed to find out how common it was for wizards to be magic-sensitive, as that would give him an indication onto how important it could be for him to learn to hide his own magic, however much of it there was.

Snape's magic was darker than Dumbledore's; it was also somehow more *active*, although presently there was an anxious tenseness to it that Harry couldn't help but attribute to being in front of the entire school. Snape struck Harry as a very private man. While Snape's magic had a whip-like quality, Dumbledore's looked more like a mantle, all-encompassing and brilliant, giving the man the illusion of a halo of light surrounding him. Something about the image made Harry uneasy, but he brushed off the feeling. Surely he was only wary of such a powerful man; after all, power was always a tricky subject.

Around him, the other Slytherins were already establishing themselves firmly within their own hierarchy; as first-years, they were the only new players, and so these first days were key, when the older students would judge them most carefully. Draco would certainly be situated at the top, as his name already practically guaranteed even if the blonde himself had not also been apt. To Harry, it was almost painfully clear which students were from powerful pureblood families; they all carried with them a certain air of aloofness and arrogance which bespoke their origins, and they were often surrounded by other students which carried themselves in a similar manner.

Harry didn't know what to think of this pseudo-political play; on one hand he found it quite interesting, and felt somewhat eager to participate. While he did not *enjoy* socializing, he was good at getting people to do what he wanted, and he looked forward to exercising and practicing this ability. Undoubtedly it would serve him in his life.

Another part of him was wary at the idea of being surrounded by, at most, allies and, at worst, enemies which were only waiting for him to turn his back to stab it. So far, he had Draco's favor, which meant he was automatically within the higher ranks of the Slytherin hierarchy; however, he could also feel that if he didn't prove himself independent of the Malfoy heir's approval, the other students would tear him apart. It was a feeling which permeated the Common Room constantly, and was more diluted here in the Great Hall but which still didn't allow Harry to relax all that much.

The meal ended and they returned to their dorms, where everyone began to get ready for bed. Harry, not feeling particularly tired, decided to read. Draco had immediately locked himself in the bathroom, much to Harry's amusement. He began to sift through his trunk, looking through its library somewhat distractedly. He eventually settled on the book on magical theory which focused on the different kinds of magic, and settled into his bed to read.

“*Illuminare*”, he murmured absently, flicking his hand above his head. A sudden blob of light materialized above him, brightening up Harry’s bed.

A few minutes later Draco emerged from the bathroom and lay down on his bed. Harry set down his book and drew his magic away from the light, snuffing it out, as he entered the bathroom. Ending a spell was always much easier than casting one; once it was active, all Harry had to do to stop the spell was to stop feeding it his magic, which was in essence what kept it going. He’d learned early on that if he didn’t maintain a steady feed the spell would end automatically; it had taken him a while to grasp the exact amount of magic each spell needed to work continuously, but by now it was much more instinctive. Initially he’d had to focus very strongly on maintaining the connection, but by now he could maintain 3 simple spells at once without too many problems. It was, however, much easier with spells that demanded a similar power level, which meant he could simply feed them all the same; he still had a few problems with over or under charging spells because he was linked to two which had very different demands.

His main problem was with figuring out just how much the spell needed; he was learning how to feel the spell’s pull and give it only that much, but it wasn’t *easy*. His magic was not calm or placid but instead fluid and slippery, and often fought his hold, as if wanting to flood the channel he’d opened for the spell. He had devised routine to practice his control over his magic, which consisted on casting and maintaining various small spells for as long as he could. Harry was actually starting to realize that there were several kinds of spells which he was able to control for much longer periods of times than others. *Illuminare*, for example, he could cast and maintain for days if needed. *Effugiat*, however, lasted at most a couple hours, despite not having a much larger demand of power. In fact, he could maintain *Tegmentum* for up to fourteen hours, and *that* spell had a very big demand.

To Harry it seemed to have to do somewhat with the spell’s ‘passiveness’; he suspected offensive spells were in general much harder to maintain than defensive spells, for example, or spells which were expected to react to situations.

“*Monere accessus*,” he said, casting it towards the bathroom door. He didn’t want to be startled from what he was about to do in case Draco decided he’d forgotten something.

He approached the shower, setting the water to ‘cold’. He tested it to make sure it was indeed at a very low temperature, before casting ‘*Æstus*’. The water immediately heated, and once he made certain it was at an appropriate temperature he stepped into the shower. This particular method to exercise control was one of his favorites, but it was also one of the hardest. If Harry wasn’t relatively sure he would not be disturbed, he would not have attempted it for fear of ending up either burned or frozen. Manipulating running water was very taxing on his concentration and magical reserves, but it was also a very efficient way of calming himself. For the last few days he’d only used his magic in very minor ways, and it tended to go rather crazy if it wasn’t exercised sufficiently.

He exited the bathroom a while later, toweling his hair mildly. He shot a glance towards Draco’s bed; the blonde’s curtains were drawn, obscuring him completely. He retreated to his bed, drawing his own curtains and calling out his light, settling in to read until he fell asleep from exhaustion.

Harry’s first impression of the Defense Against the Dark Arts class was that it smelled rather strongly of garlic.

Then Harry's eyes landed on the Professor; immediately, he was sure something was very, very wrong with the man.

Quirrell's magic was split into two distinct factions. Harry had never seen anything like it; everyone's magic was relatively monotone, deviating from shades of dark to light grey from person to person, but no one had *two* shades.

To Harry's senses it felt like the man might as well have been two people, the two sides were so blatantly different. Harry supposed a similar effect might appear if someone was, say, pregnant, but obviously that was impossible for Quirrell.

Harry paused in his musing. Wasn't it? The thought hadn't occurred to him before, it had seemed quite obvious...but he didn't know that with magic it wasn't possible for a man to become pregnant. He shook the mildly disturbing thought from his mind and focused back on his Professor's odd magical aura.

One half of his magic was pressed to his skin, vibrating feebly and looking rather like it was in pain; it had a sickly sheen which Harry had never before seen, and dearly hoped never to see again. It looked like it was *dying*. The other half was an odd combination of looming darkness and cloudy vagueness, swirling strongly around Quirrell's head but dissipating if it meandered too far from the man. This half seemed like it was keeping the other cowed and, as Harry observed for a few moments, seemed to somehow be *feeding* on the lighter magic. It made a vaguely nauseous sensation rise up his throat.

No one around him seemed to think anything was wrong with the man, but Harry supposed that if they couldn't see the distressing magical cannibalism going on in front of them, then nothing would seem too out of the ordinary with their Professor. He himself hadn't even really noticed anything until he had the man right in front of him; he blamed his inattentiveness on Snape's marvelous magic, which always drew his attention away. He honestly had no idea what any of the other teacher's magic looked like, even, but vowed to pay attention from now on.

Something was very, very wrong with Quirrell.

"Hello, c-c-class. Welcome to your first c-c-class in D-D-Defense Against the D-D-Dark Arts," Quirrell began, looking like he'd rather be anywhere but there. His eyes swept nervously around the class, widening minutely as they landed on Harry.

A strand of the dark magic surrounding Quirrell suddenly speared through the room and before Harry could react he felt a piercing pain on his forehead. He stifled a pained gasp, bringing his forehead down to his hands before anyone could see his expression, scrunching his eyes in agony.

A moment later the pain was gone, as suddenly as it had struck, but Harry took a few seconds longer to raise his head from his hands, wary of the pain returning. No one seemed to have noticed his plight, although he could feel Zabini shooting him an unreadable look. Quirrell was talking about his turban, and how it had been given to him by an African Prince; Harry paid him no attention, trying to focus on the man's strange magic.

That had almost definitely been an attack, Harry was sure of it. It had certainly *felt* like an attack; he could still feel phantom pangs of pain and a small headache building. But why would Quirrell attack him? He hadn't seemed upset to see Harry, and he certainly didn't look like the kind of wizard who would have magic as dark as the oppressive half looked. Both Snape and Lucius had magic that was at least a few shades darker than everyone around them, but both men were powerful and guarded; their darkness felt natural, earned. It flowed with them, graceful, and despite the disconcerting tone Harry would not have wanted it otherwise. It would have looked wrong.

Wrong like the darkness looked right now on Quirrell. There was just something about the way they moved together – something about the way the magic reacted to Quirrell’s actions and expressions – that was incongruous and clumsy, that felt like an awkward attachment.

The lighter magic was instead much more fluid, if feeble and vague; Harry had no trouble believing *that* magic was Quirrell’s. In fact, Harry was starting to suspect that the darker magic was not in fact part of his Professor at all. He also didn’t believe it could be a pregnancy, even if it *was* possible – Harry would never discard options just because they were personally distasteful, after all – because the dark magic was *anything* but childlike.

Perhaps it was some sort of magical parasite? A disease? Did the Professor even know? If it could attack students like it had just attacked Harry, then Harry thought it was dangerous enough to warrant at least a warning. To be fair, it was now back to sitting placidly and menacingly on Quirrell’s head, making no move to attack any of the other students.

Eventually, Harry decided to keep an eye out on the dark magic for a while before doing anything else; it strongly unnerved him, but as far as he knew it was not all that uncommon in the wizarding world to have a kind of...magical tumor? A dangerous, menacing magical tumor?

Ok, so that wasn’t the proper image to encourage himself to believe it perhaps wasn’t all that bad, even if it *had* attacked him. The headache was almost entirely gone by now, and didn’t seem to have left any lasting side-effects, although Harry would hold his judgment until the end of the day; some side-effects had a tendency to linger. He decided he’d wait and see what happened; perhaps he’d ask Draco subtly about it. For all he knew it was a very sensitive not-secret which he had just happened to miss.

The rest of the class was, predictably, rather boring and useless. Quirrell’s stutter was clearly driving Draco insane, to the point where the blonde had started muttering under his breath about getting his father to do something about it, much to Harry’s amusement. About halfway through Harry gave up on learning anything from his strange teacher and simply took out the textbook and began to read, ignoring everything Quirrell said. Quirrell didn’t seem to notice, thankfully, and the class ended without any further incident.

During lunch the Slytherins all complained about what an utter failure Quirrell was as a teacher; he was clearly terrified of his own shadow, and could barely utter a sentence without mangling most of the words with his terrible stutter. Harry didn’t really care all that much; he’d always learned from books anyways, so not having a teacher was to him no great loss. He was more worried over what the dark magic was, and whether the Professor was even aware that it was there. He had seemed quite oblivious to it, but perhaps he simply wasn’t expecting any of his students to be able to sense it either, which Harry accepted was a fair assumption. He turned to Draco, speaking softly.

“Say, Draco, is there anything about Quirrell that could be considered...odd? More than usual?”

Draco frowned. “I’m assuming you are referring to something other than what we’ve been discussing so far?”

Harry nodded, and Draco looked pensive for a moment.

“I don’t think so,” he said finally, slowly, “but I don’t really know much about him, really. He never seemed very interesting. Why are you asking?”

“Just curious. He seemed an odd character, didn’t he?” Harry said, grinning. Draco’s comment had cemented his theory that no one suspected Quirrell’s...problem, but that only worried Harry more. He was certain it was not something that could be normal. An idea suddenly struck him.

“Draco, do you know where the library is?”

“So, what are you looking for?” Draco finally asked.

Harry had been perusing various books for the past while, but so far none of them looked very helpful. He didn’t have much time before lunch ended, but he figured he might as well get a head start in looking up what might be the problem with the Professor, and where better to look than the library?

He was hesitant to express to Draco his worries; he wanted more information before he either dragged the blonde or his Professor into a problem, so for now he decided to keep the whole thing a secret.

“Nothing really. I’m just taking a look around, see what books they have.”

Draco gave him an odd look, but nodded, accepting the excuse. “Well, we only have a few more minutes before we have to leave, or we won’t make it to Transfiguration. You can look after that.”

Harry sighed but nodded, knowing he wasn’t getting much further on such a limited time. They walked out, and Harry wondered if the blonde would follow him in the afternoon as well. He liked Draco, he really did, but he wanted a bit of privacy for this research. He felt he was already invading Quirrell’s privacy by looking at all, and didn’t really trust the blonde wouldn’t notice his particular focus on diseases and maladies if he kept watch over Harry for much longer.

They arrived to McGonagall’s class with a few minutes to spare, and settled in one of the desks near the front of the class to wait for the other students to arrive. There was a small tabby cat sitting on McGonagall’s desk, and Harry was immediately suspicious. The cat had a magical aura surrounding it; this in and of itself was not altogether surprising, as Harry had long supposed there were magical creatures around. The problem was the sheer magnitude of the cat’s aura. It was much larger than it had any right to be for such a cat, and, more importantly, *felt* wrong. There was a certain familiarity to the aura as well, although Harry couldn’t really place it.

Harry’s suspicions were confirmed when the tabby suddenly transformed into McGonagall, much to the student’s surprise and awe. Harry couldn’t help the way his eyes widened with sheer glee. What marvelous magic! What was that? Could he learn to do that too? And she hadn’t used her wand to do it, either! Or an incantation! How absolutely, wonderfully glorious. He *would* learn to do that.

After the impressive demonstration, the class truly began. McGonagall was certainly strict, but she was also clearly a very competent witch and Harry couldn’t help but respect the aura of sheer control she kept about her with the students. Her transfiguration of the desk into a pig had also been rather startling, although something about it struck Harry as odd. The change hadn’t happened gradually, through the material as Harry was used to happening with his transfigurations. It had just suddenly been a pig, all at once; as the class had not exploded, Harry supposed that she was clearly not just feeding the particles directly. What was that spell?

McGonagall then stated that for a while they would be working mostly with theory, and Harry drew out his notebook and quill excitedly. They’d learn how this all worked!

However, as the class went on, it became depressingly clear to him that they were not, in fact,

going to learn how the spell worked. Their notes consisted mostly on the way to focus and bring out their magic through their wands, and how to analyze the object in front of them so that it would change as they wished. It all revolved largely around *intent*; it made sense, in a way, but Harry still felt cheated. Intent was hardly a hard, solid explanation that he could work with. And it was all too generalized for Harry to even guess at what might be behind her explanations.

The only hint he could get as to the true nature of the spell was when McGonagall mentioned that no transfiguration was permanent, which made Harry shoot her an incredulous look for a moment. Not permanent? Never? That seemed to Harry like such a waste; sure, he could make non-permanent transfigurations himself, but that would require constantly feeding the magic, which, due to the inherently unstable nature of particles, was exceedingly draining. His permanent method was, on the other hand, very stable, and once he understood the basic idea of what he was doing he didn't really need to work all that much; his magic somehow instinctively knew how to create whatever object he wanted. It bothered Harry that he didn't really know *how* this happened, as trusting magic so blindly was not something he preferred doing, but so far it worked fine and so he'd seen no reason not to keep doing it. He would, however, eventually figure out how his magic knew what an apple was and, more importantly, how to make it.

Despite trusting his magic to instinctively make an apple, however, he wasn't sure he trusted it to create a live animal; he hadn't yet dared try. Images of gory, unnatural creatures which belonged more in nightmares than reality popped up whenever he felt the urge.

McGonagall gave them all matches to attempt to turn into silver needles. The incantation was another which made Harry wince, and he ground his teeth in frustration.

He'd try. While he detested the fact that he was about to use the butchered, pseudo-Latin words, he had to accept he was inherently curious. Why did they work? Would they feel different than his own magic? What about the wand? He hadn't yet used it to cast anything, and he found himself feeling wary of how it would respond to his attempts.

He drew out his holly wand, thinking nervously to its bloodwood counterpart which was hidden in his trunk. He'd try out the spell with that one later, see if it felt different, if anything different happened.

He looked at the match and raised his wand. He could already feel his magic drawing towards the wand, the same tug-of-war drawing slightly at his concentration. He said the incantation and then swished his wand as McGonagall had instructed, forcing his magic through the wand despite its ambiguous reluctance, focusing on his image of a needle and his understanding of its properties, and on his intention to change *this* object into *that* one.

The reaction was immediate. His match shifted instantaneously into a perfect needle, pointy and silver and with a delicately round top.

So did everyone else's match in the room.

There were a few cries of glee, as students no doubt thought they had been successful in their attempts, while others looked on curiously, having either not yet cast the spell or knowing instinctively that they were not the ones which had resulted in its change. McGonagall, noticing the sudden commotion, approached the student closest to her, who turned out to be Gregory Goyle. She picked up his needle with surprise, turning it this way and that.

"Mr. Goyle, congratulations for being the first to do it. Everyone look at Mr. Goyle's perfect transfiguration."

There was a general cry of protest. Pansy raised her hand.

“Professor, Goyle wasn’t the only one to do it. In fact, I think everyone’s match turned into a needle simultaneously.”

McGonagall looked at her with disbelief. “Whatever do you mean, Ms. Parkinson?”

Pansy handed her her own needle. “I didn’t transfigure mine, and I’m pretty sure neither did Goyle.”

McGonagall took her needle, peering at it curiously. She then brought up Goyle’s and looked at them, comparing the two. Her face was unreadable. After a moment, she returned the two matches to Pansy and Goyle, and the turned to the rest of the class.

“Has this happened to everyone else as well?”

There was a general murmur of assent. McGonagall peered curiously at them all. “Well, does anyone here have anything to say about it?”

No one moved. Harry was very careful to keep his face blank and innocent; it was the lying face he presented to Sandy when she asked him how his magic was going along, and he reassured her that it was all sparks and lights. It was the face he was used to hiding behind when an adult saw him at the library alone and asked him where his parents were.

It was easy to hide when all anyone saw was an innocent, naïve child.

“It’s alright if you did it by accident. At your age it is not uncommon for you to lose control of your magic in events such as this one; you are still becoming used to your wands and magic. You will not get in trouble for these sorts of things. Now, of course, if the intention was that of a more... frivolous nature, then points would be deducted.” No one made any move to take responsibility. “Very well then,” McGonagall said, after a while, and then began moving through the class turning each of the needles back into matches so they could all keep practicing.

For the remainder of the class, Harry didn’t dare to try the spell again. He clearly needed to learn how to control his power better, as the wand was apparently some sort of conductor which either magnified or somehow made his magic flow easier. Harry was relatively sure that if he didn’t *push* his magic quite so hard, he’d get the results he wanted, but wasn’t eager to try again in such a public setting. He’d have time later to practice in solitude.

By the time the bell rang, only Draco had managed to turn his match into a needle. McGonagall awarded Slytherin 5 points, and Draco looked smug.

“You know, I don’t think I saw you try the spell once,” Draco said as they packed their things, his voice deceptively casual. Harry shrugged, careful not to let himself tense. He debated telling Draco about how he’d been the one to cast the class-wide transfiguration, but decided that keeping his power unnoticed was more important than the blonde’s curiosity. It was starting to become clear to Harry that his ease with magic was not altogether that common, although he supposed that might well be attributed to the fact that he had quite a few years’ worth of training as a head-start on all of them. All the same, the fact that he’d been able to turn all the matches into needles at once, and yet even McGonagall had had to do it one at a time had bothered him slightly. Perhaps it had to do with control? He certainly hadn’t been *intending* to cast a mass-spell, but as such neither did he have any idea just how he’d done it.

“I did try a few times,” he protested. It was partly true; he’d faked saying the incantation and wand

movement, but he'd been careful to keep his magic in check within the wand. That wasn't as easy as it sounded, because due to the constant push and pull with the wand he was constantly finding himself losing control on his magic as it would escape his hold when he was distracted by the odd feeling. As such, he'd only 'practiced' a few times before deeming it too risky to attempt it anymore and had settled for making vague motions with his wand, in case McGonagall looked his way. Obviously, Draco had noticed he was making no attempt at the spell.

Draco shot him a look which bespoke how weak he found Harry's excuse. "It really isn't that hard. I'm sure you could do it if you really tried." His eyes suddenly focused on Harry's wand as he was tucking it back in his bag. "Say, how well does that wand suit you?"

Harry tensed, shooting Draco an annoyed look. "Not here," he murmured, and then walked out of the class, intent on going to the library. The Malfoy heir followed close behind.

"Well?" the blonde asked, impatiently. Harry felt his lips twitch with amusement at Draco's imperious behavior. If it were any other person he might have found it annoying, but Draco carried his arrogance with a grace that bespoke his pureblood heritage and which Harry couldn't help but accept as part of his friend. There was a certain roughness to it which occasionally grated slightly, but that was to be expected since Draco was only 11. He had many years yet to learn how to become the perfect pureblood heir.

"I find it suits me quite well, really, all things considered," he said thoughtfully, "although it has a sort of love-hate relationship with my magic that is really quite distracting."

Draco made a small noise of assent. "Was that why you weren't casting the spell? Because your wand makes you uncomfortable?"

Harry grinned. "Yes, something like that."

A few of the other Slytherins caught up to them then, Pansy immediately siding up to Draco.

"We're going to the Common Room now. Are you coming too?" she asked.

"I'm going to the library right now, I'll be there in a while," Harry said quickly. "I'll see you later, Draco, guys." Then, before the blonde could follow or say anything, Harry escaped down the Hall into the groups of other students who had also just ended classes.

Thankfully, the route to the library was relatively simple, so Harry didn't get lost and arrived there relatively fast. He felt a little bad to for simply leaving Draco like that, but he was with the other Slytherins, and Harry needed solitude for trying to figure out what on earth could be wrong with Quirrell.

A few hours later, Harry was shaken out of the book he was perusing on exotic magical parasites by the small magical timer he'd set to warn him when it was dinner time. He sighed, closing the book and returning it to the shelf he'd found it at.

He hadn't found anything even resembling what Quirrell had. To be fair he'd managed to browse through only a few books, but they were all just so interesting that Harry couldn't help but delve into other diseases which clearly had nothing to do with what he was looking for. Who knew there were so many maladies that were caused by magical means, and that there were indeed so many

ways for one's own organism to fail? He hadn't read too much about each of them, more interested in getting a broad idea of how magical diseases worked; he'd search more in-depth if anything appeared to hint at what he wanted.

He left the library with one of the books stored into his book-bag. Madame Pince had looked at him suspiciously as he'd checked it out, as if wondering if he was planning on inflicting the various described diseases on someone. Harry merely smiled innocently at her.

There hadn't been many other students at the library, and most of which *were* there were much older than Harry, which didn't surprise him. Back in Sandy's library there were never many children, either. Most of the ones Harry had noticed had been, unsurprisingly, from Ravenclaw, although he thought he saw the bushy-haired Gryffindor from potions class there as well.

Dinner was a relaxed affair. Draco filled him in on the gossip he'd missed while at the library, which Harry listened to with only mild interest. Once back at the Common Room, as Draco retired to the bathroom, Harry drew the bed's curtains and then cast silence and privacy spells, as well as an alarm to warn him in case Draco approached his bed. He then brought out the holly wand and two matches from his bag, laying them on his bed-sheets.

"*Fies argentum,*" he said, motioning towards one of the matches with his hand; the match shifted, quickly, growing silver as it narrowed at the point and then the top became a small hoop. Within a second instead of the match lay a small, perfect silver needle. The other match stayed as it was. Harry picked them up, regarding them with care and making sure none of his magic had affected the other match. Yes, he still knew how to transfigure objects using his own methods, his own magic. Now, to try with the wand.

He turned the needle back into a match, and then drew his holly wand. He felt his magic once again begin to react without him willing it, and pushed the feeling down in annoyance. He concentrated on one of the matches, but this time instead of pushing his magic he simply pointed his wand at the match and said the incantation.

It was an odd feeling to suddenly feel as if a channel had been opened to his magic which he had not very carefully sectioned himself. His instinct was immediately to block it off, as if it was a glass of water which had suddenly sprung a leak. In his experience with magic, Harry was of the mentality that too little was preferable to too much. Too little resulted in a failed spell; too much resulted in an explosion and sometimes pain. Unsurprisingly, the match remained unchanged.

Harry regarded the wand with some wariness; he had not liked the feeling of his magic suddenly being somehow pulled from him. It hadn't been a lot, and he wasn't worried it would cause him harm, exactly, but it was an altogether different feeling from when he himself manipulated his magic's movement within himself and into his surroundings, than when a foreign object *drew* it from him. He didn't like the feeling of losing control, however brief it was. It wasn't that he didn't trust the spell – okay, so clearly *part* of him didn't trust the spell, but if he really thought it could cause him harm he would be taking many more precautions with it than simple privacy spells.

After a few moments, he cast the spell again; this time, expecting the odd feeling, he shut down on his instinctive reaction to break off the connection immediately and allowed the wand to draw out his magic.

It was a rather fast spell, and the amount of magic necessary should have been minimal with such a small object. And indeed, for a moment the wand drew out a his magic cleanly, like Harry would have expected, and the match began to change into a needle. However, almost like a switch had been flipped, the wand suddenly gave a strange sputter and abruptly attempted to pull out a large chunk of magic. It was only Harry's fast reactions and constant wariness that prevented any

potential accidents, as he instinctively shut down the channel that was feeding the wand and stopped the spell from going forth.

He shifted his gaze to the half-turned match, his mouth twisting in frustration.

Surely with some more practice he'd get the hang of it? It seemed irrational that Harry would be experiencing so much trouble when he knew for certain he had better control over his magic than other students did. Well, maybe not for certain, but he felt it was a fair guess. He was wary of trying again; the way the wand had suddenly made him lose control was unsettling, and he didn't want to accidentally explode his bed. He decided he would continue trying at a different time, and placed the needle and the half-turned match away.

I much prefer my own magic, Harry concluded as he lay in his bed, taking down his privacy spells. Even if it works right, doing magic with a wand feels strange, uncontrollable. I feel like I'm a well someone's drawing water out of, rather than a wizard actually casting a spell. I wonder if that's what it feels like for everyone else, or if it's just because I've been so in tune with my magic for so long.

Something in his gut twisted with unease once again; ever since the first time he'd used his powers, he was always aware of the magic coursing through him, thrumming under his skin like blood and life. He couldn't imagine not *feeling* that, couldn't remember how he could have possibly withstood that sensation without knowing something was missing, that something was *wrong*.

If they learn all spells in that easy, detached way, do they ever really manage to connect with their magic? Do they ever feel it?

Somehow, he doubted it.

And he couldn't help but pity them.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so very much for your comments and kudos! I wish I could answer all your questions, but that's what suspense is all about :)
Thank you for reading!

Transpicio

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

For the next few weeks, Harry's life fell into a bit of a routine. Classes, reading, talking, learning; he'd found himself becoming more and more interested in the subject of Runes and how they tied in with Rituals. He was starting to get the impression that the spells that normal wizards used where not, as he'd first assumed, some sort of made-up language, but rather a short incantation to activate a ritual which, through a more convoluted process than the one Harry used, called upon their magic to perform as the wizard wished. Although none of the books in the library went very far into the subject, it was clear to him that all these spells themselves were actually much more intricate than they first appeared.

Harry had started developing his own theory about how these spells were created, from what scraps of information he could find. He planned to eventually find better, more specialized books on the subject, perhaps in Diagon Alley, or in the Malfoy Library, whenever he got the chance to go there. There was a Restricted Section in the Library at Hogwarts, but Harry wasn't exactly sure how to access it. He was relatively sure he would have to get a teacher's pass, but wasn't willing to explain why he was looking for those books. From what he'd read from the books he *had* access to, the entire area of magic which dealt with creating new spells was considered a rather... complicated subject, in more ways than one.

Regardless, Harry had begun to form his own theories about how magic and its various manifestations worked together to create complicated webs. On one hand there was the pure, direct form of magic best exemplified by his own spells; one intention, one cause, one effect. They were useful in the sense that they were accessible directly, given he had enough power himself; he needed no movements or words – words certainly helped focus his mind on the task, but they weren't *necessary* – and provided a clean result. He'd labeled it as 'bare magic'.

On the other hand, the ritualistic magic which governed the common populace was much more complex, and dealt with various levels of passive magical effects which Harry suspected most people had no idea were even there; he'd labeled this as 'intricate magic'. Although no books dealt directly with the subject, from reading on how Rituals could be set up to include various active spells as well as passive ones – chaining them, for example, or simply layering them for simultaneous activation – Harry had gotten the idea that most, if not all, spells which were usually used through wands were actually part of a much larger and complex web of magic. This web was what allowed various spells to be 'woven' into wards or chained to create more powerful spells, as well as canceled or otherwise modified by other spells; it allowed an experienced wizard to create complex phenomena from much simpler spells by resorting to what Harry termed 'recycling', the reuse of already-created spells to achieve a certain effect. It was a practical, efficient method which Harry greatly appreciated, as it did not require the wizard to waste magic creating an effect from the ground when a much quicker method had already been devised and translated to a wand-movement and chant. Now that he was starting to get a better idea on why wizards were so dependent on wands, Harry could at least accept that there were quite a few valid points to the whole debate, and would have been content to accept the reasoning.

Except for the fact that *no books talked about it*.

Harry had never felt so frustrated, even during the first months of trying to learn Latin, when most letters still looked like gibberish and he didn't even know what some of those words meant in

English.

He'd found a few rare books that *hinted* at the various passive properties of spells, and even one that mentioned how Runes could be used to activate certain parts and not others or even add more sections if needed, but none of them stated the topic outright, even less *how* to do it. Even after almost a month of visiting the library almost daily and staying up until the wee hours of morning perusing any and all books which might provide him with answers, he'd still found practically nothing at all. It was very frustrating, but Harry consoled himself with the thought that he still had much of the library to go through, as well as various other sources from which he could procure more books. He was sure his intuitions about how spells worked was right; it made sense and it was an intelligent, respectable reason for something which had so irritated him with how wasteful it seemed to be. He simply didn't know for sure yet, but he *would* satisfy his curiosity.

On Halloween, Harry decided to avoid the Feast. It was the first time he'd been aware that that was the date his parents had died, and although he wasn't going to cry or mope, he also couldn't quite bring himself to show the cheer everyone seemed to demand on this date. Besides, he'd never celebrated Halloween before; the Dursleys certainly never allowed him to go out for candy, and Harry had never really felt the urge, so absenting himself from the Feast didn't bother him all that much. Draco had tactfully prevented the others from asking too many questions, knowing perfectly well why Harry 'wasn't feeling well', and so Harry had been left alone in the Common Room, surrounded by finery and a warm fire, his nose inside a Runes book.

When the other students suddenly returned much earlier than Harry had predicted they would, he knew something was wrong. This was confirmed by Draco, who told him about how Quirrell had suddenly rushed into the Great Hall, exclaiming about a troll in the dungeons, and abruptly collapsed.

"I can't believe Dumbledore sent us back to our Common Rooms directly," he snarled, "did he *forget* our Common Room is in the dungeon? How absolutely, fantastically convenient! I could have the old idiot *convicted* for criminal negligence."

Harry couldn't help but agree with the fuming blonde; it did sound terribly dangerous to send a group of students to where the troll had been assumed to be. No one had been hurt, but it was still hazardously careless, assuming Dumbledore simply hadn't thought about the consequences of his order. The idea that the old Wizard had done it on purpose was there, as well, but he didn't voice it aloud. He knew Draco was thinking along the same lines, but didn't think it wise to outright state such a possibly dangerous train of thought. Harry had no illusions about just how far adults could be trusted, and Dumbledore's white, white magic made him extremely nervous.

It was late November, and Harry was sitting in his Defense class, wondering idly as he usually did about the dark magic around Quirrell's head. It never seemed to stray lower than the man's neck, or away, except the few times it had reached out to attack Harry. The man's lighter magic was distributed evenly around the rest of his body, as was the magic of all the other people Harry had seen, so it wasn't that Quirrell himself was strange. Only the dark magic.

It was always around Quirrell's head. Just hanging, twirling around and around his head. Much like the turban.

The realization hit him like a punch, and Harry had to bite his lip to keep from groaning aloud in annoyance. Of course! The turban! How had he not *thought of that*.

He brushed aside his irritation with his own absent-mindedness at not having noticed the obvious link between the dark magic's position and the man's head-wear, focusing on what to do now that he had a new lead on the Professor's plight. An idea popped into his head.

He hesitated for a moment, before thinking that he might as well; he was going to make himself crazy with worry anyway, and he wasn't exactly about to go spreading word of what he saw. After all, the spell would only reveal to his own eyes what was under the turban; he'd used it before to see through walls, mostly for knowing where the Dursleys were in the house. He'd trained for a long while to be able to focus the spell on a particular section of an object he wanted to see through, and although he still had trouble controlling the spell's visibility and duration, he felt reasonably certain he was capable of using it successfully in this case.

“*Transpicio*,” he murmured, focusing on the turban around Quirrell's head.

And, as the turban faded from his sight, immediately wished he hadn't.

Dumbledore removed his half-moon spectacles, rubbing between his eyes with a slow sigh. When his eyes met Harry's again, there was no sparkle there, and Harry was struck by the thought that Dumbledore must be very old indeed.

“Are you sure, my boy?”

Harry nodded. Dumbledore's face was a mask of resignation and sadness, and Harry almost wished he could lie to the man, say it had all been a joke, if only he'd stop looking like his worst nightmares had come true. On his perch, Dumbledore's phoenix trilled lightly, as if to perhaps offer some reassurance.

Part of Harry was incredibly curious. What on earth could that *thing* be? The first idea that had popped up in his mind was demon possession, but he hadn't yet had the chance to look that sort of thing up so he couldn't be sure. The other part of him wanted nothing to do with the situation. If it was enough to make a wizard as clearly powerful as Dumbledore look so haunted, Harry wasn't sure he wanted to know more. He did not exactly trust Dumbledore, but he had gotten this far by knowing and accepting his own limitations, and he was perfectly aware that Quirrell's situation was entirely out of his league. Therefore, the decision had come down to telling Snape, his head of House, or Dumbledore. Eventually he decided on the Headmaster, if only because he supposed Snape would have come to him anyway, and so assumed the situation would be dealt with much more cleanly if performed straight from the top. He didn't trust him, but he also couldn't not *do* something.

“Thank you, Mr. Potter, for coming to me with this,” Dumbledore finally said after a long moment of silence. He seemed to have drawn himself out of his somber thoughts enough to smile at him, if still quite sadly. “Rest assured that I will take care of this...issue. You may return to your Common Room.”

“Thank you sir,” Harry said, and left his office. The dismissal left him with a vague sense of dread for his Defense Professor, but he supposed the situation was now out of his hands. He did not regret his decision to involve Dumbledore, or of having looked beneath the turban, but that did not stop a chill from running down his spine.

Dinner had ended a while ago, but since Harry had gone directly to Dumbledore’s office after it, he had still a few minutes until curfew; even so, he met no students in the Halls. The walk back to the Slytherin Common Rooms from the Headmaster’s office was somewhat long, but Harry was so absorbed in his thoughts that he soon found himself standing in front of the snake statue.

He let out a long sigh, attempting to compose himself before facing his school-mates. He wasn’t sure what was going to happen, but it did not bode well for Quirrell.

The statue suddenly moved, curling to look at him more directly. Harry started slightly; he was still not all that used to inanimate objects suddenly becoming a whole lot less inanimate, even after more than a month in the castle. Even the paintings startled him from time to time, when they would start talking at him when he wasn’t expecting it.

§What troubles you, heir?§

Harry blinked at the snake curiously. After the first time the snake had welcomed him into the Common Room, he’d tried to listen in to how it greeted other students to see if it changed its words or perhaps said anything different to them, but he hadn’t heard it speaking to anyone else. He wondered if perhaps it only did that when students were alone, for whatever reason; the castle had proven itself peculiar enough that this would not have surprised him. He hesitated for a moment, wondering at whether speaking to a statue would be considered odd, even if it did appear sentient.

§Nothing, really. There have simply been strange events going on§ he replied.

The snake seemed to be considering his response, but it was hard to tell with its stone features.

§Very well§ it finally replied, bowing its head slightly. *§If you are in need of assistance or information, I would be glad to be of help. I and my kin are forever at your service.§*

§Thank you§ Harry said slowly, somewhat unsettled at the snake’s words and unsure of what they implied. What did that mean? Was this a sort of House guide? Quite convenient, if so, but Harry didn’t think that was all that was going on here. *§I will keep that in mind.§*

The snake nodded in acquiescence, repositioning itself before suddenly opening the door to the Common Room. Harry frowned slightly in surprise, as he had not given the password; the snake clearly knew he was from Slytherin, but Harry hadn’t seen it allowing other students from Slytherin to pass, even much older ones which the snake must by now ‘know’. Perhaps, once again, it was because he was alone? Somehow, he doubted it.

Concluding that he wasn’t going to figure out the snake by just standing stupidly outside the Common Room, he quickly walked inside. A glance around revealed that most students had already retired to their dorm rooms, although there were still a few around who were working or talking. The only first-years were Blaise and Draco, who sat reading by the fire. Blaise sat on the edge of Harry’s couch, which was slightly removed from the rest of the chairs in the circle; the light from the fire shone on his captivating features, highlighting his high-cheekbones and casting a slightly red sheen on his hair. Harry could sense more than one person casting the Zabini heir interested glances, some less subtle than others.

Draco had situated himself on the largest armchair near the center, close enough that they were

still within the same circle but with a clear distance between them. There was a sense of cold tension which hung in the air between both purebloods, quiet, careful not to let their eyes stray from their respective books even for a second.

Part of Harry wanted to escape to his room directly, avoiding the strange scene, but he eventually decided that he might as well join them for a few minutes; if they had any questions as to his lateness, he'd rather answer them now. He approached the pair and sat down on his couch next to Blaise.

"What did Dumbledore say?" Blaise asked quietly, his eyes not leaving his book. Harry sighed; he was honestly not all that surprised that Blaise had figured out where he'd gone. The dark boy was exceedingly observant, and Harry knew he'd noticed how focused he was on Quirrell.

"How did you know I talked to Dumbledore?" he probed back, keeping his voice low so Draco would not overhear; whispering was common enough in Slytherin that no one paid it much mind, unless they had a specific reason to.

His question was not intended to make Blaise doubt him, but to make sure that no one else had noticed. Draco was also quite observant, but Harry trusted Blaise to keep his mouth shut more than he did Draco; while the blonde was good at keeping important secrets, he had a tendency to gossip about things he considered less vital. A face growing out the back of their stuttering, incompetent Defense teacher head would probably land in the latter category, as far as the blonde was concerned. Blaise, on the other hand, did not intervene when the other students whispered amongst themselves, although Harry was privately sure that the dark boy was still always listening; even so, he'd never heard him contribute to the local rumor mill.

Blaise gave a small shrug. "If you were someone else I might have thought you'd talk to Snape, as he tends to be more understanding with Slytherins than the Headmaster. You, however, would rather be direct and involve as few people as possible, and so going directly to the Headmaster, the top-most power in this school, is what I'd assume you'd do. You are a very practical person."

Harry's eyes narrowed. "How flattering to know that you've been observing me so closely," he said, his anger seeping through the falsely honeyed tone. Blaise had a tendency to get on his nerves when he was bored, and the Zabini heir's words were clearly meant to make him uneasy.

Blaise's green eyes met his, confirming Harry's suspicions as they flashed with amusement.

"I would be a fool not to."

Harry pushed down the urge to scowl, not wanting to draw Draco's attention to their conversation. It was already moving somewhere he'd rather it not, and yet had had to deal with rather often lately, largely thanks to the same boy now watching him with lazy amusement.

"It's your own time you're wasting, I suppose," he finally replied, managing to sound flippant despite his clear irritation. Blaise's lip curled into a slight grin, his eyes sharp and knowing.

"Oh, I am perfectly certain that my time is *not* being wasted."

Harry did scowl then, standing from the couch and leaving to his room without replying to Blaise's mocking tone. He was sure Draco would have noticed him leaving so abruptly, but he honestly could not stand Blaise when he started making comments like *that*.

Harry knew it was strange how unsettled he became whenever someone showed an interest in him, but he couldn't help it. He simply got exceedingly uncomfortable whenever anyone thought he was

in any way remarkable; being complimented had always been an almost painful situation for him, even with someone like Sandy, who he genuinely liked. She'd quickly learned that he did not react well to direct praise, and had resorted to indirect methods of showing him how much she appreciated and was proud of his accomplishments, such as by getting him interesting books and articles she knew he'd like.

Blaise had noticed early on how awkward he got if he did particularly well on a piece of work and one of the Professors singled him out. The first time Blaise had complimented him, a comprehensive commendation on his ability at Potions, Harry had choked on air, stuttered a denial and practically ran out of the room, avoiding Blaise for the rest of the day.

Since then, Blaise had displayed what Harry considered to be a decisively cruel streak, by making comments and observations on Harry's abilities or character which had him either scowling or running away, if only to avoid the words. Harry had started noticing this was done mostly whenever the other boy was bored, and so had taken to avoiding him in those moments.

It seemed Blaise took certain enjoyment out of watching Harry squirm, and Harry didn't know how to make him *stop*. He'd tried pretending that the boy's words didn't make him as uncomfortable as they clearly did, but that never worked out very well. He'd avoid Blaise completely, but the truth was that when he wasn't teasing Harry, they actually got along very well. Blaise kept mostly to himself, but sometimes could be drawn out into a discussion on a subject Harry was currently interested in; Harry had been pleasantly surprised to find that Blaise was also interested in a great variety of topics, and although he did not read as much as Harry did, knew enough to provide a more than decent conversation partner.

Even so, despite slightly resenting the boy for every so often needling him in his odd issue, he had to accept that he appreciated the fact that it was more of a personal dispute between them rather than an actual attempt at hurting him. In Slytherin, such weaknesses were open invitations for others to use against you, and Harry was well aware that Blaise was doing him a huge favor by not announcing it to anyone else, or ever really using it against him.

Still, it did make him angry from time to time.

Draco came in just as Harry was coming out of the bathroom, closing their door behind him quietly; he appeared nonchalant, but Harry could see the undercurrent of worry in the blonde's expression.

"What happened?" he asked, moving over to his trunk and gathering his nighttime supplies. Harry crossed his arms, evening out his expression.

"Nothing, just Blaise being his usual charming self," he replied sarcastically, still somewhat annoyed. Draco looked at him curiously.

"What's going on between you and Blaise?"

Harry frowned in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"Well, sometimes it seems like you're best friends, and others like you're seconds away from cursing him," Draco said.

Harry's expression froze for a moment, before he smiled widely and interlaced his fingers.

"Oh, Draco! You don't have to worry, you will always be my bestest friend in the world!" he said, his voice sickeningly sweet.

A surprised chortle escaped Draco, who shot him a dirty look as Harry laughed. "'Bestest' isn't even a word, you retrograde idiot," he snapped, humor and fondness softening the insult. He gave a long-suffering sigh as Harry merely smiled innocently at him, turning to go into the bathroom. "And don't think I didn't notice how you changed the subject there, Potter, but I'll let it slide this once."

Harry stuck his tongue out at the blonde as he closed the door, lying back on his bed tiredly as his thoughts once again turned to his Defense teacher. Part of him felt bad for having exposed his secret to Dumbledore, but he did not regret his actions; he didn't think there was anything else he could have done, anyway. It wasn't like he could just let the teacher continue on after having found out he had a *face growing out of his head*. The books he'd read on magical diseases certainly hadn't covered *that* particular symptom, and who knew how bad it could get? If it was demon possession, who knew if one day he'd start attacking all of the students much more violently than he'd ever attacked Harry?

He sort of wished Dumbledore had given him some indication of what he was going to do about it, but honestly, he'd escaped as soon as the man had allowed. His excuse about being curious as to what was under Quirrell's turban had been rather weak, and he counted himself lucky that Dumbledore had not asked him what spell he'd used to see through it. He'd need to find one and make sure he could cast it correctly as soon as possible.

A tired sigh escaped him. Hopefully, he would never see anything like that horrifying face ever again.

"He escaped?"

"Yes. He transcended the confines of the circle as if it was not there. It appears our fears are well founded."

"So it begins."

"Sadly, I do not believe it ever ended, although I had hoped for more time. It is unfortunate that Quirinus had to fall into His machinations."

"I believe it was during his expedition in the forests of Albania that he came into contact with Him."

"Indeed. We must keep watch over the area; see if anyone knows of any strange events from the past decade. It might give us some insight as to how powerful He is now."

"We clearly must also tighten the security here in Hogwarts."

"We had our suspicions of Quirinus, certainly, but the fact that He managed to remain undetected within the school's walls for this long is exceedingly troubling. If he had not been discovered so soon..."

“You say Potter came to you with the news?”

“Indeed. Simple childish curiosity led where he could not have imagined.”

“How very fortunate that Potter would turn out to be rather more Gryffindor than expected. He is already helping save the world again.”

“He has no idea what awaits him.”

“That may be so for now, but I do not believe you can keep him in the dark for much longer.”

“What makes you say that, my boy?”

“Potter is quite smart; smarter than anyone expected, him being the child of his blasted father. He is also best friends with Lucius Malfoy’s son. I do not believe it will take him long to figure out that he has an important role in the upcoming war.”

“He is also the child of his mother, Severus.”

“I am much too aware of that fact.”

“Nevertheless, I believe that it would be best for us to allow him a normal childhood before the fate of the Wizarding World is pushed onto his shoulders. We owe him that at least.”

“You truly believe this child will be the one to end this dark period?”

“He will not be alone.”

“No. He will not.”

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone!

Thank you all so very much for your kudos and lovely comments! I love reading what you all think, there are so many great ideas and interesting opinions; I could not ask for more awesome readers!

I hope you liked this chapter! Thank you for reading! :)

Susurro

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry growled in frustration as he glared at the blood-wand in his hand.

What had Ollivander said? That the wand would serve him better than any other wand ever would?

“Bloody stupid thing,” he snapped. “Maybe he meant the wand would serve me best in the sense that it would force me to use wandless magic indefinitely because *it doesn’t work at all!*”

He placed the wand on his bedside table and rubbed at the bridge of his nose. He wouldn’t normally be this irritated, but he hadn’t slept the last two night because he’d been caught up on the Runes book, and he was always a little bit cranky when he hadn’t slept. He was only thankful it was a Saturday, and so he had no classes to attend; he didn’t think he’d have been able to pay attention anyway.

He’d decided to try his luck with the bloodwand after numerous disastrous attempts at using the Holly wand to cast the magic necessary in his classes. On one hand, the bloodwand didn’t explode from some mysterious malfunction and try to force too much magic into his spells, like *some* wands he could name. But on the other...

“Ok, once more,” he said finally, after managing to get his emotions back under control. He picked up the wand, flinching slightly at the pain in his hand, and then turned to the book on his desk.

“Accio,” he said, taking care to pronounce the word carefully and clearly.

He felt his magic respond to his chant, thrumming under his skin as it prepared to activate; however, the moment he felt his magic reach the wand’s handle, it suddenly seemed to *sink*. The book, of course, didn’t move at all, and Harry cut off his magic’s access to the wand as he felt the spell dissipate into the red wood. He glared at the wand.

“I can’t cast anything if you keep eating my spells! What are you even doing with the magic?”

“Are you talking to your wand again?” Draco’s exasperated voice broke his rant. He glanced up to the blonde slouching casually against the door’s frame, grinning at his irritation. Harry tried to glare, but couldn’t properly summon up the energy to do so properly. Draco seemed to notice his exhaustion and frowned, closing the door behind him as he approached Harry.

“How much did you sleep last night?” he asked, his gaze tracing the dark circles under Harry’s eyes. Harry sighed.

“I didn’t,” he replied, somewhat apologetically. “I’m tired.”

“I imagine you would be,” Draco retorted, placing his hands on his hips in a way that reminded Harry of Petunia when she reprimanded him. He grinned a bit. “Why aren’t you sleeping?”

Harry shrugged. “Just reading. I don’t really mind not sleeping that much.”

Draco looked at his disbelieving. “Yes, well, that’s all well and good, Potter, but you can’t not sleep and expect to be alright! You should try to rest today.”

Harry crossed his arms, stubborn. “I’m fine. I just need to get this stupid wand to work and then I’ll...”

“No,” Draco interrupted. “I know you like to practice, and I know you like to read, but it’s not good for your health. Rest, and then you’ll be able to practice all you want with a clear head. You can’t tell me you’re thinking properly right now.”

Harry knew he wasn’t. It wasn’t the first time he’d forgone sleep for his curiosity, and he was well acquainted with the strain the lack put on his body and mind. At least he hadn’t forgotten to eat.

“Fine,” Harry acquiesced after a few seconds of Draco looking at him with determination. “I’ll sleep for a while, okay?”

“You do that,” Draco replied, looking slightly relieved as he smiled. “Can’t have you ruining my image by looking like an Inferius.”

“I appreciate your concern, Draco dearest,” Harry said drily, but honestly. He sincerely appreciated the fact that the blonde cared about his well-being, without being overly demanding about it. He usually only offered his help, but every once in a while would put his foot down when he thought it was important.

“Don’t let it get to your head, I already don’t know how your ego fits in this room,” Draco said, leaving the room with a wave as he returned to the Common Room. Another thing Harry liked about his friend was the fact that, once his point was made, he trusted Harry to follow through and did not push.

He sighed, giving the wand one last disgruntled look before placing it back in his trunk. He lay down in bed, casting off his shoes as he pulled on the covers.

He needed to find out why the wand wasn’t working. Maybe it was defective? And what on earth was it *doing* with Harry’s magic? It seemed to just be sucking it out. The only clue he had was that some spells vanished without a trace, while others trickled out, managing to have a slight effect.

He’d already read far in advance of this year’s curriculum of spells, which he personally thought were quite few and relatively useless, and had as such tried out a variety of spells which he thought might somehow affect the wand’s reaction. It did work, to a certain extent, but Harry was not yet sure what the difference was. None of the spells managed to emerge fully, however, which frustrated him to no end. He was not used to his magic denying him in such a way.

I hate wands. I wouldn’t even bother with this one except that I can’t not bother with it.

He fell asleep thinking on his spells and the wand that refused to work.

When Harry awoke a few hours later, his mind was clear and sharp, and he mentally thanked Draco for forcing him to take a rest. He knew he sometimes got carried away.

He still wasn’t sure what to do about the wand, however. He noted it was close to dinner, and so went to the Common Room to join the other first-years as he thought further on the problem. He’d experiment later.

He had tried out 6 spells in total; Lumos, Wingardium Leviosa, Bombarda, Reparo, Accio and Reducto. They required various levels of skill and focus on his part, and he'd already tried casting them all with the holly wand, which had ended less than perfectly.

The main problem was that his magic kept vacillating between being strongly attracted to and repelled from the holly wand, like a magnet that kept switching poles. He kept dropping objects halfway with Leviosa and Accio, and his Lumos would either blind him or pitter out inadvertently. Reparo would sometimes only fix an object halfway, and his Bombarda and Reducto would either barely scratch anything or utterly obliterate the object Harry aimed at. He had, of course, been careful to erect a barrier with his *wandless* magic before trying anything out; his wariness was well rewarded, especially when Reducto had caused a rock he'd aimed at to burst explosively, and only his strong *Tegmentum* had prevented him from being impaled by the many missile-like stone shards. In fact, all of the spells had exploded magnificently at one point or another, and it was driving Harry crazy that he couldn't seem to control it at all.

It wasn't the most dangerous experimentation he'd ever been involved in, but it was definitely in the top ten. He was only glad that he was not going to have to perform these spells in class for a while; he wasn't exactly looking forward to charges of murder.

After having witnessed this remarkable spectacle, he was understandably disappointed when the bloodwand, which he'd been so excited – if wary – to try out, had barely reacted to his magic.

He mentally categorized the spells he'd cast from least to most reactive. Least had been Lumos, which had literally done nothing; not anything Harry could detect anyway, and he'd even darkened the room as much as he could to see any effects. Most reactive had been Leviosa; that spell had pretty much functioned as expected.

Harry had initially made a hypothesis about the spells he was using, once he'd figured out the bloodwand was so...picky. He'd thought spells like Leviosa and Accio would not have reacted all that much, while Reducto and Bombarda would work better; the spells' aggressiveness factor made him think that, perhaps, a wand so allegedly Dark would prefer spells with more power behind them.

This hypothesis was blasted right out of the hypothetical water as neither Bombarda and Reducto, nor Leviosa and Accio, reacted similarly, despite having relatively similar effect and magical requirements.

While Reducto had managed to nearly fully explode the object he'd pointed to, Bombarda had barely pushed it back a few inches, even with Harry placing all his focus behind the spell; he could feel the wand eating most of his magic with that one, and he'd stopped the spell quickly after confirming it would have no effect. On the other hand, while his Leviosa was nearly perfect, Accio had, like Bombarda, gotten eaten nearly entirely. Harry had no idea why, but still noted his results.

He had, however, appreciated that his control was much more steady with the blood-wand as opposed to the holly one, when his magic was always fully willing to interact with it – even if sometimes a bit too much, in Harry's opinion. His Leviosa wouldn't win any competitions, but at least he wasn't dropping the object halfway. He was only glad that in Charms he hadn't yet had to demonstrate anything, as with the holly wand he would be lucky to only end up breaking someone's skull.

On entering the Common Room he quickly approached the fireplace and sat down in his usual couch. Without Blaise there he was allowed a few moments of peace before Draco turned to him with a satisfied look.

“Thank Merlin you took my advice. You looked like you were about to pass out,” he drawled. Harry shrugged, but shot him a thankful look. Draco nodded at the gesture and then went back to reading. Harry peered over, noting with vague interest it was a book on Herbology for 2nd year students. He wasn’t all that interested in Herbology, however, and so sat back in his chair. Draco suddenly turned to look at him.

“What are you doing for Christmas?”

Harry blinked. “Staying at the castle,” he answered hesitantly. He’d signed up yesterday, just as the sheets were being hung. He’d debated staying in Diagon Alley, but eventually decided that he preferred to stay at Hogwarts. Less hassle that way.

Draco nodded slowly, looking at him curiously; Harry supposed he wanted to ask why on earth he wasn’t going home to his relatives, but wasn’t sure how to broach the subject properly. Suddenly, the blond stood up.

“Well, it’s nearly time for dinner. I believe I shall be going.”

He then swept away from the group, which hurried to pack their things as well and follow after their standing leader. Harry chuckled at their actions and followed at a more subdued pace, getting lost in his thoughts as he wandered down the castle’s pathways.

He hated not knowing more about these spells, but he had quickly realized that there was only so much information which could be found in the usual student sections of the Hogwarts library. He was certain that if he could access the Restricted Area some of his doubts would be answered but he still couldn’t figure out how to get a pass without arousing suspicion. After all, there had to be a reason those books were in the Restricted Section, and Harry had long since learned that, sometimes, specific ignorance told others things about yourself that you would rather have remained hidden.

It was something that had always annoyed Harry, that there were some things that he couldn’t just be *curious* about. There should be no shame in discussing any subject, no matter how controversial. As far as Harry was concerned, ignorance only led to unfounded hatred and fear, and especially when it came to controversial subjects, surely knowing more was better. If you could always make informed decisions about your actions and beliefs, why wouldn’t you?

But Harry knew that that was a personal sort of preference. He knew that there were many people who, like the Dursleys, were perfectly happy to remain ignorant of the world around them and pretend that everything was always perfectly normal and perfectly in order. There were many people who thrived on ignorance, and on actively shunning those who questioned the world around them. They were often the same people who were the loudest when it came to preaching about ‘equality’ and ‘fairness’, while simultaneously doing their best to make sure that only their version of what was right and fair was being imposed. Harry resented that kind of hypocrisy the most, the kind that imposed itself on others and then claimed that it was just doing it ‘for their own good’. Because as far as Harry knew from the various history books he’d read, more – and more terrible – wars had been fought over people thinking they knew ‘what was good for others’ than just about anything else.

The thing was, even if Harry did not think he was objectively correct about how the world should function, he definitely felt like it was fair to discriminate against certain traits, such as stupidity, bigotry and hypocrisy. If he could convince everyone to just stop having those qualities, the world would be a much better place for *everyone* involved; it was a logical conclusion to arrive to, if you just thought about it for even a second. Harry had, however, long since accepted that most humans

were illogical, emotional creatures, and that sometimes reason was not the fastest way to get a point across. Still, it annoyed him that people were so willing to discriminate against others while simultaneously holding themselves to be paragons of virtue. If they were going to be illogical and prejudiced, they should at least have the decency to be honest about it.

What had recently been bothering Harry was that it seemed to him to be the same sentiment which was often turned towards Dark and Light magic. So far, he'd not found any *particular* reason why Dark Magic was so discriminated against. Oh, there were plenty of books referencing its use in terrible torture and inhuman rituals, but Harry had seen no proof that the magic used in these practices was even Dark, much less any comments on why Light magic couldn't be used to make similar rituals. He strongly disliked arbitrary connotations, such as 'any bad magic is Dark', because that seemed awfully changeable. So far, the only proof he had that there even *existed* any such thing as Dark and Light magic was the auras he could see around Witches and Wizards because, otherwise, he might have started to doubt the separation completely.

Speaking of Light and Dark magic, Harry thought as he pushed open the doors of the Great Hall and caught a glimpse of the Headmaster. Once again, the man's *whiteness* threw him off, and he quickly turned his gaze back to the Slytherin table.

As he filled his plate with food, he tried to concentrate on detecting the auras on his classmates. It was much more difficult with children, he'd quickly realized, although he wasn't exactly sure why. He suspected it had to do with their magical cores still developing, but there was a faint suspicion in the back of his head. He'd long since wondered what dictated a person's aura. The few books he'd found which spoke on the subject implied it was tied largely with genetics, although a few had seemed to suggest that usage of certain magic also played a part. This suggestion was what had sparked Harry's interest in the idea that there were certain spells which could be Dark or Light, rather than simply being an attribute of each person. However, he hadn't really managed to explore the idea too far. No matter how he tried he couldn't see any color in spells he or others used; this, of course, didn't mean there *wasn't*, but Harry had no way to detect it, and so could only guess. He supposed that if that was the case, it would at least explain some of what had been bothering him, but it still did not assuage his greatest doubt.

He could see no reason why Dark magic would be in any way more useful to create more... evil?...wrong? spells that so-called Light magic. For one, he could think of a dozen designated Light spell which, with a bit of imagination, could be used to either severely maim or painfully kill a person, all without breaking much of a sweat, so it wasn't the violence or cruelty factor. That didn't prove much either way, of course, but Harry was frustrated at his lack of access to knowledge. There *had* to be a way to know!

An idea struck him. If he could sense people's auras, it was feasible that there existed a person which could sense a spell's color, and so know if it was dark or light! Of course, he would have preferred an innate understanding of why a spell would be either Dark or Light, but accepted that it could be an arbitrary feature, such as whether a food was sweet or bitter. There was no *reason* for foods to be that way, it was simply the way their molecules were arranged and how brains interpreted those chemicals. Either way, at least it would help Harry get a grasp on, if not how magic worked, what he could predict would happen in various cases. There was only so far down one could go in looking for 'why', after all.

"Have you finished the Defense homework yet?" Draco asked him suddenly, pulling him out of his thoughts. Harry nodded.

"Yesterday. Merlin knows Snape would have my hide if I missed one of his essays."

“Still glad Quirrell got that suspicious illness, though,” Blaise interjected from his other side. Harry turned to see the wizard grinning lazily at him as he sat down.

“Good evening, Blaise. I see you’ve finally deigned us with your presence,” Harry said. Blaise gave a low chuckle which had a group of 2nd years swooning.

“Why, did you miss me, dearest?”

“Like I miss having a fever.”

“If seeing me gets you all hot and bothered, you should have said,” Blaise purred.

Harry choked on his pumpkin juice and barely managed to refrain from spraying it all over Pansy. Beside him, Draco snorted.

“Blaise, control yourself. You’ll give poor Harry a heart attack one of these days.”

Blaise’s grin widened.

“Ah, Draco, it’s all in good fun! Besides, I wouldn’t bother if Harry weren’t so...responsive.”

Harry sputtered, his face tingeing pink as he shot Blaise a withering glare. The other boy merely laughed good-naturedly for a moment before turning suddenly serious.

“Speaking of sudden, suspicious departures, have any of you heard the recent whispers?”

Harry frowned in confusion but beside him Draco tensed, and he could see Greengrass’ eyes widen with alarm on Draco’s other side.

“This is not the place to speak of such things, Zabini,” the blond said, his voice cold and sharp, and Harry wondered what on earth they were talking about. In front of him, Pansy shot Blaise an alarmed look before turning down to her food.

Blaise sighed, looking bored. “There is no place to speak of these things, Malfoy. Not lately.”

Draco’s lips pursed. “That may be so, but there are worse places than others. The Great Hall, for one, as opposed to our Common Room.”

Harry knew better than to ask out loud, since this was clearly a very sensitive subject, and so shot Draco a questioning look. The blond seemed for a moment not to understand, before sudden realization settled in his eyes.

“Of course. A wizard of your type wouldn’t know,” he said, quietly, and Harry frowned.

“My type?” he asked, not sure if he should be offended. Draco sighed.

“I keep forgetting you are Light. You act so much like us.”

“Why would I be Light? And what do you mean, ‘us’?” He could guess, but he wanted to see what Draco’s reasons were. Perhaps the blond could give him some insight on the subject.

Draco’s expression turned confused, then thoughtful. “The Potters have been mostly Light for generations, so you should be too...unless you’ve been practicing quite a bit of Dark Magic for a while,” he said after a moment. Harry blinked, storing the information away to be considered later; if that was true, it could answer a few of his questions about Magic types. “‘Us’ is Dark Wizards, although I suppose given the fact that you are a pureblood it...wait.” He suddenly frowned. “You

aren't a pureblood, either." He shot Harry a somewhat frustrated look. "I keep forgetting. You just behave exactly like one."

Now it was Harry's turn to be confused, but a small suspicion was starting to form. "Why wouldn't I behave like a pureblood, though?"

Draco's expression unexpectedly twisted into an ugly parody of a smile. "...why," he said, his voice suddenly rancorous.

Blaise sighed, catching Harry's attention. "It's become a somewhat recent fashion for Light wizards to either stop behaving like purebloods or refuse to learn pureblood traditions, especially half-bloods like yourself. I believe it is some sort of twisted statement on 'equality'. Like they even know what that word means," he suddenly snarled, his voice flashing with bitterness on the last sentence. Then he seemed to control himself once again as he calmly sipped his pumpkin juice.

Harry stared at him for a moment, shocked. He'd never seen Blaise lose his composure like that, even if only for a moment. Beside him, Draco's face had gone tight with tension as Blaise spoke, although Harry was glad the frankly frightening smile had stopped.

"We had a chance," he said angrily, almost noiselessly under his breath. "A chance to explain, to actually be *heard*, to make honest to Merlin *changes* to this stupid, biased, corrupt society. We were so close!"

Harry suddenly pulled at Draco's arm firmly, making the blonde shoot him a startled, questioning look.

"Why don't we go talk in the Common Room? Much quieter," he said cheerfully, subtly dragging the blond away as Blaise stood and hurried to follow. Looking back he caught Snape's eye and he sent the Professor a short smile as they excited the Great Hall, largely unnoticed.

As they walked down the deserted halls, Harry shot Draco a glare.

"I'm not even sure what you're talking about, both of you," he said, switching his scowl onto Blaise for a moment, "but even I know that that is not something to be talking about in the Great Hall!"

"He started it," Draco said sulkily, even as he looked mildly embarrassed at his slip. Blaise merely looked amused, which honestly put Harry at ease. He wasn't quite sure how to deal with an angry Blaise.

"While it is nice to finally have confirmed that you are indeed five years old, that is *no excuse*," Harry groused, finally pulling the two into the Common Room. Thankfully it was empty and so they took their respective seats by the fireplace.

"Okay. Now. Tell me what in the seventh layer of hell that was all about," Harry said. Draco leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes.

"Dark magic has for a while now been largely discriminated against, especially since the settlement of this particular Ministry. There have been various laws created to repeal the use of various branches of Dark Magic as well as to limit the activities available to Dark Wizards. There are very few ways to learn any of the past Dark Traditions, and many Dark Artifacts have become illegal to possess, buy or sell. The only reason my family is fine is because we're rich and we're smart, and the Ministry corrupt and stupid. Why do you think there are so few middle or low class Dark families? They've been hunted down, forced to become Light or disappear. Most of this has

happened within the last 20 years; the discrimination has been going on for much longer, but only now has the Government gotten quite so...radical about the situation. Now even acting in the traditional *pureblood* manner is being considered a Dark, and therefore illegal, practice."

Harry frowned. "I assume no such laws or restrictions have been passed on their Light counterparts?"

Draco laughed, an unpleasant, forced sound. "Why would they do that? Light is *light*. Light is *good*."

Harry let out a frustrated breath. "That's no argument. It's not like I couldn't break someone's neck with Leviosa."

Draco shot him a surprised look at his sudden viciousness, but Blaise merely laughed.

"Well, that's why they created the *Mobilicorpus* spell. It's basically Leviosa for people, in that it's impossible to make sudden or unnatural movements with the levitated body. Makes you wonder how many people have died from accidentally having their necks snapped mid-air, doesn't it?"

Harry let out a surprised chuckle. "Seriously? There, see! That's exactly what I'm talking about. How is Leviosa better than...I don't know...Gemino?"

"Gemino?"

"It's supposedly a curse, but all it does is multiply an object until the spell is canceled. Then all the copies are also destroyed. I mean, how is that even a curse? I'd have to get pretty creative to figure out how to hurt someone with that. It even apparently takes a lot of magic to multiply objects which are too large, so it isn't like one could make *too* much of the objects anyways."

"That is kind of a pathetic curse," Draco said, looking amused, "but that doesn't mean that there aren't other, worst curses out there. I mean, the Entrails-Expelling Curse is pretty unsalvageable."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Because a well-placed Diffindo couldn't accomplish the exact same thing?"

Draco appeared vaguely alarmed. "I never thought of that," he stated with some shock. Then his expression turned subtly thoughtful and, so faint that Harry barely heard him, he muttered to himself, "but would it work as efficiently?"

Harry wasn't sure he wanted to know what the blond was thinking, part of him wishing he hadn't overheard. Draco usually came across as the standard spoiled pureblood heir, but every so often Harry caught glimpses of a much more dangerous personality hiding within the blond. He still wasn't sure how to react to it, or if he should acknowledge it at all.

Meanwhile, Blaise stared at him with new-found wonder. "Wow, Potter. You been thinking about killing someone?"

Harry looked affronted. "No! All I'm saying is I don't get what differentiates Light and Dark magic."

"Well, if we're speaking about genuine magic itself, I think you are thinking about this the wrong way. It's not about Magic, not really," Draco said. "It's about us. Wizards. Light and Dark magic is about how we interact with Magic. Without wizards there is no Dark or Light."

"To be fair, it's really about any magical creature," Blaise interjected. "There are Dark creatures as

well as Light creatures, and of course neutral ones.”

“Yes, you’re right,” Draco said. “What I mean to say is, *we* are Dark or Light. Dark wizards are better at casting Dark spells and Light wizards, Light spells. No one casts pure magic, not really; all spells have already been manipulated one way or the other. Extended use of one branch can also influence one’s proclivity, but that’s about all there is to it. As far as I’ve ever known or heard, there’s nothing behind that. Wizards have been Dark or Light since they had access to magic; I don’t know that there’s much sense to asking why that is, though. On the other hand, ‘curses’ are designated by the Ministry, and don’t ask me how any of *that* works. Merlin knows how anything gets done in there.”

Harry peered at them both. “That makes sense. I hadn’t quite...thought of it like that.”

Draco scoffed lightly. “Of course it makes sense, it’s the truth. And I’m honestly not surprised you haven’t thought of it. The Light side doesn’t like to accept that they are merely a human construct which could change any day. They like to imply they have their reasons, but without proof there’s not much they can really claim.”

“Or, those in power don’t want the public to realize it,” Blaise said, leaning back. “There’s no better way to gain control of a population than to create a common enemy, after all.”

“Evils draw men together,” Harry replied drily. Blaise let out a surprised huff.

“When people are friends, they have no need of justice,” he said. Harry shot him a disbelieving look before grinning.

“Piety requires us to honor truth above our friends.”

“The greatest virtues are those which are most useful to other persons.”

“Political society exists for the sake of noble actions, and not of mere companionship.”

“Oh, stop that,” Draco interrupted, irritated, as Blaise opened his mouth to respond. “It’s rude to make inside jokes in a group, especially if the group consists of merely three people!”

“That’s hardly an *inside joke*,” Harry murmured, but decided to spare Draco’s pain. “Sorry. But it *was* relevant.”

“Do I look like I care, Potter?” Draco huffed. “Anyway, do you get it now?”

“Yes, I do. Thanks Draco. You’re awesome,” he said, smiling widely.

“What? Aren’t I awesome too?” Blaise asked jokingly, just as the Common Room door opened and people started pouring in. Harry gave him a considering look before shrugging.

“Eh,” he said, which set off Draco’s laughter and a vaguely hurt look on Blaise’s face which quickly turned into a grin as Pansy, Crabbe, Goyle and Daphne joined their group. Daphne and Pansy looked rather worried as they peered at Draco and Blaise, although they relaxed minutely as they heard the blonde laughing.

“Glad to see you’re all well after leaving so abruptly,” Daphne said carefully, looking around the room subtly. Immediately, Draco tensed and Blaise’s face regained the slightly bored look which Harry was starting to associate with the boy thinking. Beside her, Pansy’s shoulders hunched slightly.

“Excuse us for that. We had an unavoidable...issue,” he said, glancing at Harry, who merely smiled innocently. Daphne huffed delicately before turning to Blaise.

“I...what were you referring to?” she asked, her voice a nervous whisper. Blaise’s expression was unreadable.

“There have been rumors of sightings,” Blaise said after a moment. “Nothing conclusive, of course, but...interesting nonetheless.”

“Do you think...?” Pansy said, pressing the edge of her skirt anxiously. Draco rubbed at his temples.

“Until he calls us, we may never know.”

“Doesn’t it frustrate you?” Daphne suddenly said, her voice rising slightly before Draco’s glare reduced it to a whisper once more.

“Of course it does,” the blonde replied, coldly. Daphne flinched slightly.

“...Perhaps we must seek him out, now,” Blaise said, and Draco considered him carefully.

“Why do you say that?”

“Everyone thought he was dead for most of the past ten years,” Blaise said. “Even now only a few have begun to speculate about the fact he might have survived Potter’s little spectacle.”

Blaise’s statement finally confirmed Harry’s suspicions that they were indeed talking about the Dark Lord, even as suddenly everyone’s eyes turned to him. He could see the sudden realization dawning that he was the renowned defeater of he who Harry could clearly see was basically their Lord and leader, even after nearly a decade of being presumed dead. He realized, suddenly, that he had a deplorable lack of knowledge on the last war, and vowed to remedy that as soon as possible. It was a weakness that, given his friends, was all too easily exploited.

He smiled apologetically, suppressing as best he could the latent feeling of dread he could feel rising inside him. “Yeah...sorry about that.”

There was silence from the group for a moment before Draco suddenly burst out laughing at the ridiculousness of his statement. Harry felt with relief the tension dropping as Blaise let out a low chuckle and Pansy huffed in amusement.

“It’s almost a pity you aren’t an honest to Merlin Light wizard,” Draco said, once he’d calmed down. “It would be so much easier to hate you for ruining our lives.”

Harry felt himself go cold at that. He knew it wasn’t his fault, not directly, but the knowledge that Draco wanted to hate him was sobering, and painful. He wanted to think the blond was just joking, but there was a sliver of seriousness to his tone that Harry couldn’t ignore. He swallowed drily.

Draco looked at him for a moment, clearly sensing his mood, before sighing and shaking his head. “No, it wasn’t your fault, Potter. I can’t really blame you for anything.” He grimaced. “If anything, we should be thanking you.”

Harry frowned, confused about the sudden turn-around. “What do you mean?”

Blaise leaned forwards, his eyes focused on the wall opposite them where a beautiful painting of the French landscape hung. “In the last decades, he was...not the same.”

“Our parents tell us about how he used to be fascinating, brilliant, powerful; about how he could charm the masses into doing anything he wanted with a few well-placed words. How he was set to become the youngest Minister of Magic himself before long,” Daphne said.

“His decline was not sudden, but it was noticeable,” Pansy continued fluidly from where Daphne trailed off, and Harry had the distinct impression that this was a story they had all heard many times. “He became more violent, less logical. His anger was unpredictable and immeasurable. He began torturing his followers for the slightest mistakes, and even when there were none.”

“His plans fell through,” Draco said. “Plans he’d spent decades building were tossed aside for raids and violence. He recruited young, immature and vengeful wizards who wanted nothing more than to cause mayhem and destruction. Our parents didn’t know what to do. They were trapped by the insane Lord, their families and loved ones held hostage. They couldn’t escape him, and they had no one they could trust.”

They sat in contemplative silence for a few seconds before Blaise’s low, humorless laugh broke through their thoughts. “I’m sure they were actually quite relieved when they’d first heard of his death. He was falling too far, too fast, and he was taking them all with him.”

“Why?” Harry asked, frowning. Draco shrugged.

“No one knows. Some say the amount of power he had began to drive him crazy. Others say he performed a ritual that went wrong.”

Harry took in their downcast expressions.

“Was it better?”

“Of course it wasn’t better!” Pansy snapped, her hands clenching. “After he was gone, the Ministry descended on us like starved vultures! They took everything they could get their grubby, greedy little hands on, even if it was an ancient family heirloom or priceless inheritance. They took our friends, our families, even those who were innocents, civilians, and either threw them in Azkaban to rot or outright killed them. They have no respect for anything!”

Blaise spoke up quietly. “We avoided most of it, because we’d kept neutral. But others weren’t so lucky. Did you know many Dark families tried to defect during the war? No, no one knows, because the Ministry lied about it. When someone tried to go to them for help, they would imprison them, or kill them, and then claim that they’d captured them in a raid.” His jaw clenched. “Their little image of victory, of an enemy with no soul and no face, was more important to them than basic human decency. Even when the war was over, they never once accepted that the Dark Lord had ever been anything other than evil, anything but a terror to be exterminated, and that anyone who had ever followed him was just as bad.”

“The only reason my family got out was because my father has many friends, and a lot of money,” Draco said. “He also has a lot of dirt on powerful Ministry officials, and they couldn’t get rid of him without endangering their own positions. He used his influence to help as many Dark families as he could, but even he could only do so much.” He turned to Harry. “So it’s a bit hard, you have to understand. You saved us from the Dark Lord, but...”

He didn’t have to finish the sentence. Harry understood perfectly, and he could feel a deep frustration simmering within him at their words.

It was one thing to kill people during war, when you were trying to keep yourself safe and fight for what you believed in. But executing those who were running away, trying to escape? Imprisoning

people because their families were Dark, even though they'd had nothing to do with it?

And *then* pretending like all along they were paragons of virtue, upholding the right values in society, and casting all blame on a man who was clearly insane?

"I will help you," he said, his voice quiet but firm. "I will help you fix this. I may be young, and I may not know much about what happened, but this obviously isn't right, none of what happened could possibly be *right*. What the Ministry did was *horrible*, and everyone's acting like it didn't even happen. Many people don't even *know* it happened. The Ministry's just acting like they did nothing wrong at all, and everyone is just letting them get away with it. No one's stopping them." His frown deepened. "I'm going to stop them."

They were all quiet for a moment before Pansy spoke up, quietly. "It's not something you can fix that easily, Harry."

Harry frowned at her. "You think I don't know that? I'm not talking about tomorrow. I'm not even talking about the next few years. I'm not just..."

He sighed, then, knowing that none of them would yet understand what he was talking about. Not yet. In their eyes, he was just an eleven-year-old with no real experience and nothing to offer. But Harry was the heir to an incredible fortune and a well-known Light family and, most importantly, he had his magic. He knew, with time, he could become a force to be reckoned with.

But right now, he was still just a child, and he had little to offer past a strange, muted, tiny glimmer of unexpected hope for their future.

"Look. Maybe I can't fix it, but I *will* try. And besides, I won't be alone," he said, his gaze meeting Draco's. The blond's eyes were cold and calculating, missing the humor from before.

"No, you won't," he said slowly, and Harry could see a spark of hope light his eyes. It was humbling, to think that Draco really believed in him. Harry did not want to let him down. He turned to the rest, who were all looking at him with varying degrees of new-found respect, if still skeptical. That was alright. They would come to believe him in time.

"Do you really think He could come back?" Harry asked, turning back to Draco.

They all seemed to understand the implications of his words. "We don't know. But if he does...we can only hope he returns better," Draco said, and Harry could hear the undertone of fear in the blonde's voice. Years of hearing terrifying stories from his parents about their Lord could only instill a sense of dread in him, and Harry pitied the boy; because he knew, and Draco knew, and everyone in the room knew, that when their Lord returned, the Malfoys would go to him. Whether they wanted to or not. And Harry vowed, silently, that when the time came he would help Draco in whatever path he chose.

They sat in silence for a few more minutes, until they all decided it was time to retire to sleep. They plodded to their rooms with subdued grace, all of them weary and fearful of the future they could feel was soon – much too soon – to arrive.

Hello everyone!

I hope you like this chapter! It's a bit different from the previous ones, but I promise it is quite important. I had fun writing it!

Thank you all for your lovely reviews and kudos! They make me so happy, each and every one. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Thank you for reading! Hope you enjoyed.

Edit: The end to this chapter had been updated! I need to switch some things up, and it wasn't as clear as I needed it to be. I hope you like it!

Demonstrare

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The night air was cold on Harry's skin as he peered curiously through the bars of his cradle at the moon shining brightly through his window. He tried to sit up, managed it after a few tries; he could hear the house settling around him, a quiet stillness which added to the slightly misty sense of the scene.

There was a strange sound from in front of him, for a moment like a siren wailing, broken, and he couldn't tell when it became a shriek, a crying, breathless scream of words he couldn't understand, yelling he couldn't comprehend, and then the scream turned into laughter -- the most horrid, jarring, high-pitched laughter Harry had ever heard. The screaming and the laughter seemed to have melded into one, a ghastly, unnerving sound which Harry hoped he would never, ever hear again. He couldn't see anymore, couldn't move; the moon's light had suddenly turned red, then a bright, bright green that filled his vision.

The screaming, terrified laughter never stopped.

Harry shot up from his bed, the last remnants of the dream vivid in his memory. He was breathing heavily, and could feel his skin prickling as his shirt clung to his damp chest. He rose a hand to his face, and realized he was trembling.

He hadn't missed the nightmares.

He stood up, sighing, glad only that Draco wasn't here to have heard any screams. He wasn't sure if he *had* screamed, but was glad at least no one would have been there to hear them. He hadn't had to worry about that for a while now; he hadn't had a single nightmare since he'd arrived at Hogwarts, hadn't for a few months before, and could only wonder why he was having one now. He hated thinking about them, especially since he couldn't shake the feeling that it was a memory; now, he could only assume it was a memory of the night his parents died.

It would make sense, he admitted, in a twisted, cruel way; as a baby his vision and ability to recognize sounds and faces was limited at best. He couldn't actually see anyone else in the room with him, although he was relatively certain there had been two people. Other than that, all he really remembered was the bright green light...and the screaming.

He plodded into the bathroom, peering tiredly at his own face. He could see purpling bags under his eyes, his face looking pale and somewhat sickly. He grimaced slightly at his own appearance, and proceeded to wash up as best he could.

"*Tempus*", he said, and sighed when he realized it was 6:29. He'd fallen asleep around 3...maybe 4.

He wasn't sure.

He was tempted to fall back into bed, but decided he might as well get some breakfast. He slowly and clumsily put on his clothes before wandering over to the Great Hall. He felt dizzy and lightheaded, which was mostly just an annoyance to him. He'd felt worst before, and was reasonably certain he knew the limits of his own body, so he assumed he wasn't about to faint in the middle of the Hall. All the same, it was probably a good thing that he was about to get food. He could barely think straight as it was.

He arrived at the Great Hall in a daze, and for a few moments couldn't even remember which table he was supposed to sit at. Finally focusing, he proceeded to walk over to the Slytherin table and help himself to breakfast, not noticing the worried gaze which followed his path. He ate in silence, surrounded by only a few other students which had stayed over during the winter holidays. He didn't know any of them.

He could feel himself nodding off at intervals as he ate, trying to get enough to sustain him for a while and yet feeling slightly nauseous. He hadn't eaten a lot yesterday, and his body was letting him know it really didn't appreciate this.

As he finally gave up and was wondering whether he should go back to his room to sleep a bit more, he felt a hand land on his shoulder. He blinked, unresponsive for a moment, before turning to see Snape's tall, dark figure behind him.

They stood in silence for a little moment, Harry not comprehending why his Head of House was there, and Snape looking like he was fighting with himself about something. Finally, the Professor spoke.

"Mr. Potter, if you would follow me."

Harry blinked again, and he could almost see a flash of worry pass over his Professor's eyes. Then he nodded, and stood up to follow him.

The only two other teachers who were already at breakfast, McGonagall and Flitwick, watched them leave with very similar curious expressions.

"Mr. Potter, how are you feeling?"

Harry was shaken from the daze he'd fallen into as he walked after Snape, peering up at his Professor with a vacantly confused expression.

"Uhm...fine, sir. Why do you ask?"

"You look exhausted, Potter. How much have you been sleeping lately? Eating?"

If this had been taking place a few months ago, Harry might have thought someone was impersonating Snape. As it was, he knew of no one who could imitate the peculiar mixture between kindness and frustration which Snape seemed to constantly wear around him nowadays. It used to be that the frustration overwhelmed the kindness, but eventually, the scales started tipping

in the other direction. It probably started with Harry staying after class to talk to Snape; at first the Professor seemed to be merely tolerating him (the first few times he looked like he couldn't understand what on earth Harry was doing there at all), but eventually he would act somewhat expectant, even bringing up material on his own. Harry found, to his great satisfaction, that Snape was nowhere nearly as coarse in private as he appeared in front of his class. Once they'd gotten over their first impressions – and Harry couldn't for the life of him figure out why Snape had disliked him so much at first – they both found out, somewhat surprisingly, they got on reasonably well.

Snape was good at explaining – when he wanted to be, which Harry privately considered was much too rarely during class – and knew quite a lot. Harry certainly could admire the man's extensive knowledge, not only on his own subject, but just about any topic Harry had brought to him until now. They would usually talk about once a week, sometimes to discuss something Harry had read recently which he either didn't really understand or wanted a different view on, what opinions or ideas he'd had about what they'd done during the class, or else any thought which popped into Harry's head during the week.

Harry was attentive and eager to listen, and made sure to ask only questions as necessary; he quickly came to the conclusion that Snape did not have a lot of patience, even when he enjoyed the topic being discussed. Although Snape could talk at length on almost anything, he was quick to decimate queries he thought were redundant or simple; it reminded Harry of Draco, and he wondered if this was where the blond had acquired his sharp, contemptuous wit from. Lucius seemed too diplomatic to have such a cutting tongue.

Even with Snape's acerbic wit, Harry had never felt offended by the other man. Perhaps he could have, for Snape had a sense of humor which was often somewhat cruel, his words sharp and cutting; but Harry had always been good at knowing when he was being made fun of, and Snape never did. He obviously wasn't considered an equal, but he was taken seriously, and that was all Harry could have asked for.

What it all came down to was that, by now, their relationship had grown beyond that which it had been initially, and Harry was relatively certain that Snape did not have this sort of relationship with any other student, except perhaps for Draco. He'd grown fond of Snape, despite everything, and he was relatively certain his Professor had grown somewhat fond of him.

"Not as much as I probably should," Harry admitted after a while, bringing a hand to his head, which had started to ache slightly. Snape clearly noticed the movement, and frowned at him, clearly demanding an explanation. Harry smiled a little.

"My head just hurts a little."

"Of course it does, you stubborn child," Snape snapped, although it lacked any true harshness. "You can't simply not eat and sleep and expect your body to be alright."

"I don't," Harry replied, feeling himself become slightly annoyed. "I know this is terrible for my body, I'm not doing it because it's *fun*." A distant part of him flinched slightly at the snarkiness of his tone, but Snape seemed to also have picked up on the fact that Harry wasn't doing very well at the moment.

"Then why are you doing this?" Snape had slowed his pace down somewhat, which Harry was grateful for. He really couldn't keep up otherwise.

"I'm reading, mostly. There's just so many interesting books, I feel like I can't waste any time here." It really was true, to an extent; he was doing other things too.

Snape shot him a look which conveyed to Harry that he was both quite unimpressed and yet ever so slightly impressed, another expression which Harry didn't think he'd ever seen anyone wear.

"And you don't think that your own health is as important as your knowledge?"

"No," Harry responded automatically, although he realized from Snape's vaguely alarmed look that this was probably not the proper response. He couldn't, however, think of a proper way of hedging around it, not as he could feel his headache getting worst and his vision fading around the edges. He suddenly felt a hand come around his shoulder, and he looked upwards to see that Snape's face was contorted with alarm.

"What is it?" he managed to ask. Snape's features blanched, but his arm did not move from around Harry's shoulders, holding him firmly upright.

"You just nearly fell, Mr. Potter."

Harry blinked, noticing they had stopped walking. He closed his eyes tightly, trying to get the world around him to stop spinning. It worked, and after a moment he opened his eyes to see Snape peering at him worriedly. It made something warm grow in his chest; he was still entirely unaccustomed to other people caring about him at all, and seeing his teacher, who for all intents and purposes could have simply ignored him – ignored him when he explained any strange, complicated ideas, turned him away every time Harry came to him with a request which had nothing to do with the class, talked over him when he wanted to state his opinions – *caring* about his well-being made something inside him glow with warmth.

"What are you smiling about now, you stupid child?"

"I'm just happy," Harry replied, and he could feel a part of him try desperately to prevent any more words from escaping his mouth, but in that exact moment he couldn't quite understand why he wouldn't say what he was thinking. "I'm just happy someone cares about me." He leaned slightly into the hold Snape had on his shoulder.

For a moment, Snape was completely silent. His expression reminded him oddly of a deer caught in the head-lights, although Harry couldn't imagine why he would look like that. Besides, his vision was starting to swim in front of him, and he once again felt himself being pulled upright.

"Come, Potter. You clearly cannot be trusted to take care of yourself, so that task falls to me now." His voice sounded odd to Harry, somewhat strained. They wandered slowly down the corridors; Harry guessed they were going down to the dungeons mostly from how humid and cold the air started getting around him. He couldn't quite recognize the area around him, and his head was beginning to spin again. Around the time he was about to tell Snape that he had to pause for a moment to breath, Snape suddenly stopped.

"These are my private quarters, Potter," he said, taking out his wand and pressing the tip to the center of the door. "I can Floo you over to the Hospital Wing from here."

"No, please." The sense that he did not want to be in the infirmary was sudden and strong, and he could feel bile rising at the thought of using the Floo. He'd used it once before, during his stay in the Leaky Cauldron; it had been unpleasant to say the least, and he thought it would be an even worst idea in his state.

The fact that he did not want to be in the Hospital Wing was more difficult to explain, but no less relevant. The infirmary was the one place in the school that Harry could not be in for long; he would start feeling incredibly uncomfortable within minutes. His magic was the main culprit; he

could feel it *bristling* in a way, like a cat that was being rubbed the wrong way, if he stayed in the room for an extended period of time.

Snape raised an eyebrow at his exclamation. "And why not, Mr. Potter? You are in need of nutrient potions and sleep right now; the Hospital wing is the primary place to get both."

"Please," Harry repeated, turning to look at his Professor pleadingly as his magic began to flutter around him anxiously. "I can't. I can't stand it. It's too *white*."

Through his bleary eyes, he suddenly saw Snape's magic freeze. This realization finally managed to reach a part of his brain which was not entirely affected by his lack of food and sleep -- *he'd just told Snape about the magic, about his ability to see magic*. His eyes widened and he snapped his mouth shut, averting his gaze from his Professor's. Stupid, stupid!

For a few seconds, Snape did not respond as the door to his quarters finally opened and he ushered them both inside. Harry was placed on an armchair in what Harry could only suppose was the Living Room, although he couldn't quite make it out.

"Do you mean to tell me," Snape said after a few seconds of standing in front of him contemplatively, "that the Hospital wing being 'white' bothers you?"

Harry tried to control his breathing. "I...don't know why. I just...I'm sorry?" He pressed his hands together.

He couldn't see Snape's expression, but his tone was odd. "Mr. Potter, have you been to hospitals...a lot?"

Harry frowned, uncomprehending of where Snape was going with this. "No? Not very much," he replied, softly. He'd been expecting Snape to demand how he knew the infirmary was white, not...

Oh.

Harry let out a long sigh, closing his eyes firmly as he tried to stifle the throbbing in his head. He couldn't *think* straight like this.

Of course Snape hadn't immediately thought he was talking about magic. The Hospital wing *was* white; white in color.

It was draped entirely with white sheets, white counters, white drapes, white beds.

Once he'd realized this, he could feel his chest relax from the knots it had tied into. Besides, he didn't even know if Snape could even tell that the Hospital was *white*. For all he knew, he could actually explain what he'd meant – about the magic – and Snape would have no clue. Snape probably had no idea that the Hospital wing *was* white.

In that sense, of course.

He heard footsteps walking around the room for a moment before a flask was suddenly thrust in front of his face.

"Drink this," Snape said. "It's a nutrient broth. I expect you are not capable of eating much right now; this will provide you with all the nutrients your body desperately needs."

Harry nodded, already feeling his throat work as he smelled the potion; he wondered if it was the same one he'd been making over the summer, but expected Snape to be able to brew up a much

better version. Even so, he was aware that it would taste terrible, even if he hadn't already smelled it, and so proceeded to plug his nose and chug the potion down.

It tasted about as terrible as he'd been expecting it to.

Once he was done, making sure to ingest all of the potion regardless of how his throat worked, he handed the vial back to Snape, who proceeded to once again disappear from his muddled line of vision. Almost at once, he could feel an intense drowsiness overcome him, and he turned a suspicious look towards Snape as he took a seat in the armchair in front of Harry's.

"Did you just drug me?" he asked, incredulous. He could almost see a tiny smirk grace his Professor's expression.

"It's what you need."

"You could have just *told* me," Harry murmured, annoyed. "I'm about to fall asleep anyways; it was unnecessary."

"While you may think that to be the case," Snape replied, his voice lined with irritation despite the lingering worry, "it is clear that you cannot be trusted to actually *go* to sleep, or listen to your body's needs. Do not worry, it is very mild; you will wake up within three hours. I trust that is not too much of your time wasted." The sarcastic tone made it clear it was not actually a question.

Harry would have perhaps made a retort to that comment, but by that time, he was already asleep.

The room was painted in pastel, neutral colors; Harry couldn't tell what they were, but he was sure they were nice and calming. The light from the moon shone on his face, on his walls, on his floor.

There was something on the floor.

There was something on the floor.

The moon was suddenly red, then a bright, bright green.

The screaming, terrified laughter continued.

"...otter. Harry. Harry, wake up!"

Harry awoke at the feeling of someone shaking him firmly, the after-images of his dream still tainting his senses as his magic reacted instinctively to defend him against the perceived threat.

"*Vade retro!*" he screamed breathlessly, and felt his magic lunge out and forcefully push away the person who'd been shaking him, as he immediately proceeded to jump into a crouch at the edge of his bed...his bed?

This wasn't his bed. And, he realized with dawning horror, this wasn't Uncle Vernon or Dudley

who he'd woken up with his screaming.

This was Professor Snape, and the man was looking at him warily from where Harry had thrown him against a wall.

They sat in silence for a few moments, as Harry tried to get his heart-beat down to a decent speed and his mind to forget the last vestiges of the dream. He really, *really* hadn't missed the nightmares.

Although the floor... *decoration* was a new addition. He shivered.

"Are you awake now, Mr. Potter, or are you going to attack me again?" Snape's tone lacked any emotions Harry could identify, but Harry could see the man's magic snapping around him aggressively. He shrank back into the couch.

"I'm sorry, sir," he managed to say after a few moments as he curled around himself. Would Snape think Harry was dangerous? Would he be expelled? Would he attack him? Harry didn't think so, but he looked so agitated, and Harry *had* just attacked him..."I'm sorry, I thought--" *you were my cousin*--I'm sorry."

"Stop apologizing, you irritating brat," Snape finally snapped. Harry let out a slow breath, forcing himself to relax. Snape wasn't actually angry at him, or else he wouldn't have called him a 'brat'. He tended to do that only when mildly annoyed.

Even so...

"I really am sorry, though," he said, once more, feeling himself grin slightly at the irritated huff that Snape gave. "I just reacted on instinct."

He regretted his words as Snape's expression suddenly froze, although Harry couldn't tell why.

"Sir?" he ventured.

"How often do you have nightmares?"

Harry's jaw clenched. This. He didn't want to discuss this. Not at all. There was silence for a little while, during which Harry suddenly realized his head didn't hurt anymore and his vision no longer swam in front of his eyes. He wanted to thank the Professor, but before he could get up the nerve Snape broke the silence, sighing.

"Very well. I understand you may not want want to speak of this, but..." His face twisted in what Harry thought might have been sadness, but was gone in an instant, "...my door is open if you ever need to speak to someone about it. Any of the other teachers will be glad to help as well. It may sometimes not look it, Potter, but adults are here help as best we can. We may not always succeed, but we do try."

And if Harry could hear a note of resentment and frustration in his tone, he didn't question it.

He nodded. "Thank you, sir," he said.

"Now," Snape said, finally coming to where Harry had by now relaxed from his crouching position to sit in the armchair in front of him, "there are three things we must discuss before I let you get on with whatever it is you need to do. The first is your ability to take care of yourself. I will not stand for one of my students fainting in the middle of the hall because they couldn't put aside a few hours to eat and sleep. You *will* take better care of yourself; the next time I find you like I did this morning, I will not hesitate to inform Madame Pomfrey."

Harry nodded, acknowledging the threat, although part of him was already wondering how to get around his body's necessities. He knew how to prepare a nutrient broth already, so as long as he ate enough to sustain himself he ought to be alright in the long run. He'd have to investigate if there were any spells or potions to lessen the effect of sleeplessness.

Snape peered at him suspiciously, as if he could tell exactly what Harry was thinking, which honestly wouldn't have surprised Harry all that much; the man seemed like the type of person who also would sometimes forgo sleep and food for some intellectual pursuit, and he ought to know Harry well enough by now.

"That brings us to item number two; now, do not feel you must answer me this now, but know that, once again, I am only here to help." And if that didn't sound ominous, Harry didn't know what did. "Why does the Hospital wing being white bother you?"

Ah. Harry had hoped Snape would have forgotten about that.

"I...ah... it's not the whiteness itself that bothers me," he hedged, making sure his expression was contrite and somewhat ashamed, as if he had sounded a false alarm. "I'm just not great about so much...cleanliness. I feel like I might break or dirty something. White is just such an easy color to ruin, you know?" A part of him wanted to laugh nervously, but he suspected that Snape was more likely to believe a small sort of lie, the sort which hid within itself because it recognized how silly and absurd it was. Nervous laughter was reserved for when he wanted people to tell he was lying. He didn't actually want Snape to figure it out quite yet. As such, he kept his face open and upset, turning his eyes to his hands, which he forced to fiddle nervously with the edge of his sweater.

From in front of him, he could feel Snape watching him carefully. He rose his eyes slightly and met Snape's gaze, although his entire posture was still bent over and defensive.

I'm not afraid to meet your eyes. I'm ashamed, yes, but not afraid.

I'm not lying, just ashamed of the truth.

There was a moment when Harry wondered if Snape was going to push forward; he didn't believe the man had believed his lie, but he was sure that he at least had some doubts. Harry could tell that Snape thought that perhaps Harry had been placed in a hospital often, perhaps from accidents or, more likely, abuse or bullying. He wondered if that sort of thing had happened to Snape himself. He reacted similarly to how Sandy did, whenever she noticed any of his lingering bruises from Dudley's 'fun'. Harry had grown much better at protecting himself as he grew older and gained better control over his magic, but Dudley was as stupid as he was wide; no matter how much Harry showed him he could seriously hurt him at any point, Dudley still seemed to forget every few weeks and attempt to come after Harry again. It left, at worst, bruises from where Dudley had gotten lucky, but it was still enough for Sandy to notice.

Now, Harry had no physical bruises, but bruises to the psyche were just as easy to spot if one knew where to look.

And, often, the only ones who knew where to look were those who had those same bruises themselves.

There was a small while during which Snape simply observed him quietly and Harry observed him back. Then, Snape nodded, apparently prepared to drop the subject for now.

"Very well, then. Now, for the third issue. What spell was that?"

"What?" Harry frowned. Spell? He hadn't cast any spells. He didn't even have his wand out.

"*Vade Retro*, you said," Snape replied, his face devoid of any expression. "And your magic reacted to violently push me back. What spell was that?"

Harry blinked, thinking quickly. He vaguely remembered casting the spell, now that Snape mentioned it, although the memory was hazy from his still half-asleep state at the time. He'd cast it with his magic, of course, and in Latin. It wasn't the type of spell they would be taught yet, either, although he'd read about *Flipendo*, which would have had a similar effect, if less potent.

He had his wand in his pocket, and Snape didn't appear to have noticed it had been cast without a wand. As for the words...

"I don't really know...I just said it," Harry responded, shrugging, as if he didn't understand why it was strange to Snape. Snape watched him carefully, his eyes narrowed, but Harry didn't know what else to tell him. He was sure it sounded less than convincing, and he himself would have been equally suspicious in his place, but what could Harry tell him? That he'd made the spell up?

He really ought to start doing that, now that he thought about it.

Snape watched him for a while longer, before seemingly resigning himself to the situation at hand. He looked almost disappointed, and Harry felt for a moment a strong desire to tell him everything, but he grabbed it and pushed it back down forcefully.

Snape only looked like that because he didn't know. He didn't know what Harry was, what he could do, how he was so different. Harry himself still didn't know, and wasn't that laughable? It was his magic, his power. He should have control of it by now.

It didn't matter to Harry that it was clear that no other kid his age had control over his power. Comparing himself to others had never made sense to Harry; he was his own person, had his own abilities and limits and potential, and trying to feel better about himself because he was – what, different than others? – was, to him, stupid. Who cared if the other kids didn't have control over their magic? Absolutely no one. They weren't expected to, obviously. Harry didn't care. *He* ought to have control over his magic. *He* ought to be able to control his powers. Other children simply weren't relevant to him. He wasn't better than them, or worst. He was simply...not them.

And the fact that he didn't have control over his magic yet, didn't even understand it really...

Well.

That was a very personal, very deep source of shame to Harry.

"I really don't know, sir." Harry sighed, using his shame over his inadequacy to better hide the truth. "I was just...startled. I don't know where I learned that spell. I wasn't thinking."

Snape gazed at him contemplatively, the disappointment still lingering but now with a trace of something else.

"Have you read, Mr. Potter, anything about psychology?"

Harry blinked. Okay, so that subject wasn't *entirely* unrelated, but what it could relate to Harry wasn't sure yet. And that made him uneasy. "Yes, sir."

"Have you read the experiments made on languages and reflexive actions?"

Harry did not like where this was going. Not at all.

“Uhm...some of them...”

“And did you know, Mr. Potter, that in a large percentage of cases, people react to being startled by speaking in the language that they consider their mother tongue?”

Harry could feel the blood draining out of his face. It was a wholly unpleasant feeling.

He wanted to lie. He wanted to claim that that was ridiculous, that those studies were wrong, that *he* was wrong.

But this was Latin they were talking about. Harry couldn't lie about Latin. He just couldn't.

And he realized he didn't have to lie.

“Yes.”

Snape seemed surprised by his answer, obviously not having expected him to acquiesce so quickly. “And how, Mr. Potter, do you explain having *Latin* as a mother tongue? I am quite sure your...guardians are not fluent in this language.”

“They aren't,” Harry said, and as a plan formed in his head, he smiled. “But I am. I'm fully fluent in Latin. *Poterat probare, autem non loqueris Latine.*”

Snape, for just one second, looked like he'd been slapped. Then he managed to recover somewhat. It reminded Harry of the first time he'd left the man gobsmacked, and was sure it wouldn't be the last. He opened his mouth, then closed it, his face a mask of incredulity even as Harry's grin expanded. He'd never had the chance to show off his Latin except with Sandy, and was sure that Snape would appreciate it as much as she had, if perhaps not as openly. As soon as he managed to get his brain working again, that was.

“Merlin, how on earth...are you actually fluent in Latin? What did you just say?” Snape sounded like he was fighting not to believe it, and yet a part of him actually did. Harry appreciated that the man had at least some faith in him; it was more than most adult ever had.

“I am. I said, 'I could prove it to you, but you don't speak Latin'.”

Snape snorted, a noise Harry had never heard from him. “Indeed. I...” He rose a hand to his forehead, rubbing circles into the skin. “I would like some more proof of this ability of yours before I can believe you; you understand, I'm sure.”

Harry did. “Do you have any book written in Latin I could translate for you? Some book you've read a translation of yourself, of course, so that you know I'm not just making stuff up.”

Snape nodded, and stood up to rummage through his bookcase as Harry sat back in the couch, letting out a long breath. He could distract Snape for now with his Latin and, if needed, convince the man that that was why he was so nervous. It wasn't a common ability, Harry knew for certain by now, and so knew that Snape would, knowing to some extent Harry's need for privacy, accept his reluctance to share.

Snape came back with a book and handed it to Harry, who immediately proceeded to open the book and begin reading.

For the next few minutes, Harry proceeded to translate the first chapter of *De Aquis* to the best of

his ability; it wasn't that he didn't understand what he was reading, of course, but rather that, as Harry had often found, translations were *hard*. He often had to stop to think of what word would properly express a certain concept in Latin, and sometimes had to use entire sentences when there was no direct alternative. The book was quite interesting, though, and so Harry had no trouble doing to his best; as he continued, it became clearer and clearer that Snape really did believe him. Eventually, Snape raised a hand, signaling Harry to stop.

"Alright. That was quite impressive," Snape said, and Harry grinned, proud. "Would you mind telling me how you came to learn Latin?"

"I learned largely by myself," Harry replied, already preparing for Snape's scoff of incredulity; but, to his surprise, it never came. Snape seemed to pick up on his confusion.

"I know you well enough by now, Potter. I'm well aware of your...learning capabilities." His tone held a note of respect in it, and Harry felt torn between feeling proud at the praise and like he didn't deserve it. "While I would be reluctant to accept this of anyone else, it is clear to me that you are not...average. Even so, it is a remarkable feat, and you surely could not have done it entirely by yourself; someone had to have introduced you to the language in the beginning."

"Yes," Harry replied, glad to have the chance to give Sandy the credit she deserved. He certainly couldn't have managed without her and her library. "I had a friend; she's a librarian, and she was the one who gave me all the books I needed to learn Latin. She also helped with any problems I had, and I am very thankful to her. She's wonderful."

A flash of sadness flashed through Snape's face, although Harry wasn't sure what had caused it. His story wasn't a sad one, after all.

"I'm glad you had someone like that in your life, Potter. Since..." he sighed, looking suddenly tired. "...your relatives clearly weren't...what a boy like you needed."

Harry swallowed the sudden lump in his throat. "...they were okay." No, they weren't, but Harry wasn't quite at the point where he would admit that sort of thing openly yet. It wasn't worth it. "But I'm also very glad she was there."

Snape nodded, and they sat in silence for a few more seconds. Harry hoped the subject might have been dropped then but –

"And you don't have any idea of how you may have cast that spell?"

Harry's mouth opened, and then closed once again on his instinctive, misleading response – panic often caused wandless magic among children, and would be a valid enough excuse that Harry knew that Snape would buy it.

But he couldn't do it.

It felt wrong to lie after he'd shared so much with Snape, even more after today. He respected his Professor, liked him even, and Harry knew he was not the type that would ever laugh at Harry's...inadequacy. He wanted to trust him.

He wanted to trust somebody. He was tired of keeping all of this to just himself. He had no one to talk to if he had ideas, or frustrations, or questions. Having just one, singular person who knew about his magic would be enough.

But he'd never opened up to anyone, not to this extent, and it was hard to start.

“I...sir. Can we...can we possibly discuss this at a later time?”

Snape's face was unreadable, and Harry looked at him pleadingly. He didn't want to lie, but he couldn't quite tell him the truth just yet. He had no practice with the truth; Sandy had been there from the start, and even she had never quite known the entirety of Harry's abilities. Draco only knew about the wand, and the Dursleys only had the vaguest idea of his powers – mostly that they could be used offensively.

Literally no one, apart from Harry himself, knew all of the truth. And if Snape pushed, Harry wondered what he might say.

Finally, thankfully, Snape nodded. “Very well, Potter. You may go.”

Harry nodded, grateful. As he was leaving, he heard Snape call his name.

“And Potter, do take better care of yourself. I wouldn't want all the paperwork that would come with you fainting in the middle of class.”

It was as close as Snape ever came to stating he cared about anyone's well-being, and Harry, who had come to know the man relatively well over the past few months, could see that. So he merely smiled, thanked him and promised he would, as he traipsed back to his room to continue reading. He'd get something to eat later.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you like this chapter; it's mostly about the relationship between Snape and Harry, which I intend to play an important role in the story. Hopefully Snape is not too out of character; I've always disliked how horribly he treated Harry in the books, disliking him for his father (even if James was terrible), and so wanted to give him my own, hopefully not too drastic spin. So, as always, this is meant to be another Snape; he won't be like in the books, at least not entirely.

Thank you everyone for your lovely comments and kudos! You are all so incredible and wonderful and lovely and everything an author could hope for. I love each and every one of you. Thank you so very much! As always, all comments and corrections are always welcome!

I hope you all keep enjoying the story!

Donum

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry awoke on the 25th of December to a misty, snowy landscape and a vague sense that he was forgetting something. It took him a few minutes to realize the date and the significance, but even then all it did was make him sigh.

Harry was not particularly excited about Christmas; not because he didn't like it, but because...

Well. He supposed he did dislike Christmas a little.

The fact of the matter was, ever since he was little, all Christmas had ever signified to him was that Dudley had a family and parents that loved him, and Harry didn't. It wasn't even a matter of him being particularly sentimental about his parents, it was just that he used to spend the day wondering how his life would have been different if he had grown up with his family; surely he would have been happier growing up, at the very least. Instead, he'd only ever gotten presents from Sandy; small things, books, trinkets, which Harry nonetheless treasured because they were from Sandy and he had nothing else.

Now, he wouldn't even have that.

So it was with some resignation that he got up that day, sighing as he wondered fleetingly if Draco and Blaise and the others were having fun with their families. He'd received a few letters from them over the past few days, since they'd left for the holidays. Draco wrote the most, followed by Blaise. Harry hadn't actually expected the dark-haired boy to write to him, but although their correspondence was somewhat stunted, it existed, which Harry had to admit was nice. He'd never before had anyone to correspond with.

It was with some surprise, therefore, that he saw the pile of presents at the foot of his bed.

He stood there, shocked for a few seconds before he managed to finally gather his bearings. He leaned down and peered, amazed, at the box on the top of the pile.

It was a large present, wrapped with beautiful bronze paper and tied with a golden bow which shone with a satiny appearance. He looked at the card then, still halfway in disbelief at what he was seeing.

Dear Harry,

Merry Christmas! We hope you enjoy this present.

Lucius, Narcissa and Draco Malfoy

Harry had to swallow sharply at the sudden dryness of his throat.

“Merlin, now I feel bad,” he murmured after a little while. “It's rude to get me something when I didn't get *you* anything.”

He placed the present gently next to him on the bed, before bending down to pick up the next box. It wasn't as large as the other one, and had no bow; the wrapping paper was, however, also very clearly high quality, a burnt sort of green which nonetheless appealed to Harry in its simplicity. He

turned the card on the top, grimacing slightly as he read the inscription, his cheeks turning steadily pink.

To my dearest Harry,

Merry Christmas, sweetheart. May this day be as lovely as you are.

Always yours,

Blaise Zabini

He scowled. Part of him wanted to throw the present out the window, but the fact of the matter was, it was probably a gift Harry would like. It would be undoubtedly thoughtful; this was *Blaise*, after all. He might enjoy getting under Harry's skin, but he was nothing if not observant. While this annoyed Harry at times, it also meant the dark-haired boy knew what people liked and wanted. Harry wondered if this had to do with his mother and her...reputation. It wouldn't surprise Harry if Blaise had picked up some things from her. Besides, it might be considered just a bit rude to simply throw away the present without even opening it.

Harry felt he would be completely justified in doing it, but it would be rude. He absolutely did *not* feel bad about not having sent the boy a present.

He sighed, amused resignation coloring his expression as he placed the gift beside Draco's. The next gift was a box of chocolates wrapped in a bow, which Harry peered at curiously for a moment before reading the note attached. They were from Pansy, which surprised Harry somewhat, as he and the girl didn't really talk that much. He would consider her his friend to some extent, but the gift surprised him.

The next box had no note attached, and Harry frowned suspiciously at it before placing it beside the other presents. Perhaps it would be inside?

The last present was not in a box, but was instead soft. It shone with a very strange, distinctive magical aura; most magic looked somewhat dull to Harry, like fog, but this shone like liquid silver, shifting like water in a moonlit pond. He picked it up carefully, curious but wary, and as he raised the parcel the wrapping paper slipped off it and fell to the ground. Harry had only a few seconds to think that whoever had wrapped this was really bad at wrapping, before he found his jaw dropping.

His hand, the one covered by the cloth he was holding, had become invisible.

He stared at the cloth in his hand, incapable of making a sound, for a few more minutes before raising the material to his face. It appeared see-through, in a way, but when he turned it around he could see his hand blocking the usual path his sight would have taken. With the cloth on top, his hand was once again gone.

He hesitated for a second before pulling the cloth around his shoulders, gasping as he looked downward and seeing nothing where the rest of his body should have been.

He began to twirl around a little, watching parts of him disappear and reappear from beneath the cloak. After a few minutes he began to feel a little dizzy so he sat back down on his bed, placing the cloth beside the other presents. Looking down he noticed a small note had come along with the cloak, and he picked it up gingerly.

Your father left this is my possession before he died. It is time it is returned to you. Use it well.

A Very Merry Christmas to you.

There was no signature.

And wasn't that suspicious?

For the moment, however, neither the fact that this had belonged to his father nor the mysterious sender of the cloth mattered to Harry half as much as the cloth itself. His mind was already working at trying to figure out how on earth such a thing worked.

Sure, he could make something look transparent, but how to make it actually be transparent and, more importantly, how to make it make *other* things invisible? This cloth's value lay not in *it* being invisible – although that alone was pretty impressive – but rather in it making whatever was inside it invisible. Harry's *Transpicio* worked by allowing photons to pass through the material Harry wanted without becoming disrupted by the matter there; in other words, what Harry's magic was doing was allowing the photons which would go through Harry's eyes to pass undisturbed through the 'invisible' object. The material wasn't *actually* made invisible, it simply looked like it had to Harry.

But there was no reason that that had to be so. Harry *could* make a material invisible, but that would require constantly feeding the material magic so that the photons remained undisturbed; Harry had no idea how to actually turn the material into something which wouldn't disturb light – which he supposed meant he didn't actually know how to make material invisible after all. Well, he could change it to glass, but that wasn't what he actually wanted. He wanted the material to stay the same, not...

Wait. What material was this cloth? He pressed the material through his fingers trying to think back on what cloths he'd felt before. He knew it wasn't cotton or polyester, nor was it leather, silk, satin or nylon, but after a little while had to admit to being completely lost. It felt like water woven into material, and Harry doubted it was any fabric he could have encountered in the Muggle world. Besides, the cloth was positively radiating magic.

Maybe that was it? Maybe this material's properties were to allow light to pass through it without...but then again, it still had to make the things behind it invisible. Harry supposed at least that much had to be attributable to spells, even if the cloth itself was invisible. Perhaps it somehow transmitted its properties to whatever was inside it? Fueled by the user's magic? It didn't have to make other things transparent, after all; simply imitating its own properties was not such a hard task, even if it wasn't being consciously directed. Harry didn't know exactly what kind of spell that would be, or what words he could use to do it, but the theory sounded reasonable.

"Let's try it out," he murmured, reaching down to his bedsheets, then changing his mind. If he ruined his sheets because his experiment had gone wrong, he didn't know if he'd be able to replace them. He frowned. There *must* be a way to replace them; in a magical school such as Hogwarts, there had to have been countless occasion in which not only bedsheets, but probably entire rooms were destroyed beyond repair.

He shook his head to prevent himself from going further with that train of thought. He was trying to figure out the cloth, not Hogwarts' cleaning system. Not for now, at least. He'd certainly think more on that later.

Eventually, he picked up a piece of parchment. There was no reason it wouldn't work as well as a piece of cloth; for his purposes, it was nearly identical, since he had no idea what the cloak was made out of. He brought the parchment over next to the invisible cloth and began to examine their differences and carefully cataloging all he could find.

Parchment, he knew, was made from either calfskin, sheepskin or goatskin, which was then

stretched out thinly and dried.

Pellis, essentially, although Harry didn't feel that that was the precise word for it. It was as close as he thought he could get. *Corium*, perhaps? It didn't really matter, but sometimes trying to identify the object in Latin helped Harry figure out other objects. Such as the invisibility cloak, for which the only words he thought made any sense were *tunica de aquai*, even though there was no way that was actually true...well. It could be true, he supposed. In fact, the more he thought about it, the more it became obvious that there was no reason it *couldn't* be true.

Sometimes magic really was a pain. Nature was very nice, very organized, very clear about what was and what wasn't and what could be done and what couldn't. Then magic came and messed it all up.

Harry let out an amused huff. Here he was, complaining about *magic*. Oh, what a terrible, dull life he led!

He turned to the parchment once again; he was very hesitant about trying to turn it into an *tunica de aquai*, largely because he was relatively certain it would simply turn into liquid, which would be annoying. After all, his magic could only work as far as Harry understood what he was doing, and in this particular case he had no idea what he was doing. Still, his curiosity was nagging at him. Finally, he ripped off a small section of the parchment.

“*Fies tunica de aquai.*”

For a moment, nothing happened. Then, the parchment began to drip. Within moments it had become a puddle at Harry's feet.

“*Vae merda,*” he muttered, honestly more amused than anything. He had expected this, after all.

Having no more ideas at the moment on how to deal with the cloak, he placed it beside him. He wondered if Snape might know anything about it; he'd look in the library first for any mention of the strange cloth, but Snape might also have some idea as to who had sent him the cloth. It really was bothering Harry not knowing.

He then turned to the other presents. He picked up Draco's first and began to carefully peel off the paper.

His smile grew as he finally uncovered his gift.

Two books, and a very beautifully embroidered mokeskin pouch. Harry had commented to Draco once that they sounded very useful, and he grinned at knowing that the blond had actually remembered his little throwaway comment.

The two books were wrapped individually, and Harry noted that they had a note on top of them.

Do not open these with other people around. They might not be appreciated.

Harry's eyes widened, and he looked at the books curiously. He was alone in his room, of course, so he proceeded to open the first one carefully. Once he could finally read the title he understood Draco's precautions, and his lips quirked in a grin.

Blood Wands: What they are, how they work and why you have one

Harry was sure this was at least in part a bit of a comment on the huge amount of trouble Harry had been having with his wand, which Draco had seen quite a bit of. He supposed it also stemmed from

Lucius and Narcissa's concern; he was somewhat surprised that they'd cared enough to send a present at all, let alone be so thoughtful with it. Harry appreciated useful gifts above all, and this book was very useful. It was also likely rather rare – and quite possibly borderline illegal. Blood magic was frowned upon by most people, and finding any books on the subject was very hard. Harry had found no books on the subject in the Hogwarts library at all, and any books which mentioned it in passing did so in a rather negative fashion, as if the subject was distasteful.

The second book was called *A Beginner's Guide to the Dark Arts*, and a quick browse through it revealed it was exactly what it looked like; a beginner's guide to learning dark spells and rituals. Harry had complained a few times to Draco that the library contained very few books on Dark Magic, and that finding any spells which could possibly be considered Dark was almost impossible. The blond had looked amused, and asked if he expected the school to teach its students spells which were considered illegal. Then he'd commented his *own* library had many books on Dark Magic. He'd thought the blond was simply bragging at the moment, but now it appeared he'd been offering. And wasn't that nice of him? He noted with amusement that the blond's gifts largely stemmed from Harry's complaints; he'd have to make sure to complain to the blond more often, given this as the result.

He then reached for Blaise's present, sighing as he caught sight of the note again. Peeling the paper off, he became very glad he really hadn't thrown the gift away.

Spells and Runes: Recognizing, Modifying and Creating Spells

He felt his jaw drop for the second time that day.

How on earth did Blaise know about this? He didn't know whether to be angry at the boy for his nosiness or grateful that he'd actually gotten him this book. Harry had made no headway on finding this information, and having it dropped in his lap like this was more than he could have hoped for.

He decided he might as well be grateful, and forgave Blaise his uncouth note. It felt awfully like being bribed, and after a moment Harry decided he was not above such a thing. This was useful, and he'd be damned if any sense of decency held him back from things that were useful.

Finally, he turned to the last box. He opened it carefully, but given that he could sense no magical aura around it he wasn't too worried over what could be inside. As he finally took out the gift, his eyes widened.

Brevis Historia De Magia

He turned the book around, looking for a note, and instead found a picture.

He swallowed.

It was a picture of his mother, younger than he'd ever seen, and she was sitting next to a lake in what appeared to be a large meadow. She was smiling at him, her expression joyous and carefree.

He turned the picture around, hoping there might be some inscription behind it. It would be cruel to not give any explanation for this, in his opinion. Attached to the back, with a temporal spell which released the paper as soon as he touched it, Harry found a small note.

Dear Harry,

I apologize for not telling you this sooner, but I must admit I was somewhat reluctant even telling you this now. Your mother and I were friends when we were younger; we were in the same year but, unfortunately, due to my own stupidity, we had a falling out during our Hogwarts days. This is

one of the few pictures I still have of her, taken from near our homes when we were children, and I felt that you should have it. She was a dear friend to me, and if you wish, you may ask me about her.

I hope you enjoy this book. I forbid you from reading it to such an extent that it puts your health at risk. As I explained, I will not have you fainting while under my supervision. Consider it my present that you will endeavor to take better care of your health, at least during the Holidays.

Merry Christmas

Again, there was no signature, but this time Harry had no doubts as to who had sent him this gift. He tried to swallow down the lump that had grown in his throat as he read the note.

“Stupid bat,” he murmured fondly, his voice choked slightly. He didn’t know why this was affecting him so much...that was a lie, he knew exactly why this was affecting him so much. He didn’t really want to admit it, not even to himself, but he was starting to see Snape as some sort of...father figure. It was ridiculous, really. He’d only known the man for a few months! He was Harry’s teacher and caretaker for most of the year, and so was *paid* to take care of him; for all Harry knew, the man actually didn’t like him at all and was simply putting up with him. Perhaps he was like this to all his students, and Harry was simply being egocentric.

Even as he thought this, he knew it wasn’t true. Even Draco was somewhat surprised with how much Snape and Harry got along, and the blond didn’t even know the half of it. The present was a surprise, and Harry might have even wondered if it was entirely too weird for a teacher to be sending his student a present, but he supposed their relationship wasn’t normal anyways, what with the fact that he’d apparently known Harry’s mother since they were children.

It was also true that Snape was the closest thing he’d ever known to any sort of legitimate parent. The Dursleys obviously had never even been considered, and the main problem with Sandy fulfilling that role was that Harry had always felt she was not exactly parent-material, however much affection he had for her. He’d never been able to fully discuss his ideas with her, to ask her anything, to argue anything, and he’d never been tempted to show her all he could do. Not like with Snape, who was slowly but surely tearing apart all his walls with his curious, ridiculous expressions, acerbic wit and small, frustratingly affecting acts of kindness. Despite all that, he didn’t know that he’d ever tell Snape any of this. He was sure the taciturn, impatient, blunt man would have a heart-attack if he ever heard Harry thought...

“Oh, Merlin,” he sighed, glad that there was no one around to witness his tiny emotional melt-down.

He placed the book next to him in the bed next to Blaise’s presents, determined not to think on the subject for now, and allowed himself to lay back in the bed as he held his mother’s picture above his face. He didn’t know how he felt about his biological parents, honestly. He regretted he’d never known them, but he didn’t quite miss them. Pictures like this mostly simply made him sad that people who looked so happy had had to die, but it wasn’t really anything deeper than that.

He was also curious as to why Snape had not mentioned his father at all, and a nagging suspicion was beginning to form in his mind.

Snape would have to also have known his father, as they would have been in the same year; however, the fact that he’d not mentioned him at all hinted at the fact that they hadn’t really gotten along while in school. It might also explain Snape’s initial reservations towards Harry; if they’d been school rivals, then he might have had an instinctive reaction to seeing someone who even Harry himself would admit looked so much like James Potter.

Maybe they'd fought over his mother?

The idea made him frown. It seemed like too...*shallow* a reason, but he accepted that it made some sense. Harry himself had never really understood fights over lovers, but he knew that they could be considered Serious Business to others. Even so, the idea that Snape had put that much importance on who he wanted to date seemed too trivial for the man. But maybe Harry was just being judgmental. If they'd been friends since they were kids, and then she'd stopped talking to him because she was seeing someone else, he could see how that would be hurtful. Still, Snape didn't sound like she'd scorned him; rather, he'd specified *he'd* been the one to do something to offend her.

Harry sighed. He supposed he'd have to ask, if he ever wanted to know.

The rest of the day was spent perusing his new gifts, only emerging from his quarters to attend the Christmas feast at the behest of Snape's note. He sent the man a smile as he sat down at the table in the Great Hall, noting how Snape's expression flattened as he nodded in his direction before turning away. Harry got the distinct impression that the man was somewhat embarrassed, and he couldn't stop smiling for the next 10 minutes.

Harry considered it his first true Christmas, and he wouldn't have changed a thing.

Well, maybe that Blaise had been there so that he could have thrown something at his smug face.

As a thank you for the gift, of course. Never let it be said that Harry wasn't thoughtful, too.

Harry awoke early on the first day of class. Everyone had arrived the day before, and Harry had taken the time to thank each individual for their presents, as well as to apologize profusely for his lack of foresight into taking their presents into account.

He'd decided, after a while of trying to figure out how on earth he was going to justify not getting them any presents when it clearly was a well accepted custom, to go with the cleanest and easiest excuse; that he'd never celebrated Christmas.

Of course, he wasn't going to tell them about the Dursleys; he simply explained that his guardians didn't believe in Christmas as a time to give gifts, but rather as a time to spend with the family and come together to celebrate the Yule season. He hoped they wouldn't ask too much about it; he knew it was considered rude by some to inquire too deeply into others' religious beliefs and customs and, while Harry himself wouldn't have considered it particularly intrusive had it been any other topic, in this particular case he was comfortable not letting others know too much about his home-customs. He really, really didn't want to explain to anyone that the best Christmas gift he'd ever gotten was the Latin-English Dictionary Sandy had given him a year into his Latin lessons; that would raise various questions about both Latin and Sandy – who was conspicuously not his guardian – which Harry was not particularly eager to answer.

It wasn't that the book itself had been a bad present; rather the opposite, and he was thankful every day for it, and for Sandy's acceptance of his determination and love of the language. He simply knew that other children – children like Draco, who could have practically anything in the world which could be bought, and quite a few things that couldn't – would not understand why a *dictionary* would possibly be considered Harry Potter's best Christmas present.

The only problem with his explanation had been what he was doing in the castle for the holidays. Why hadn't he gone home for the Christmas season?

Harry had eventually decided to use a bit of the truth and a bit of a lie.

"My guardians and I...we have a complicated relationship," he answered Daphne's somewhat blunt question about why he hadn't gone home for the holidays. "I'm sure they would not have been upset to have me there, but I thought they might appreciate my giving them the holidays for themselves."

Daphne had looked somewhat ashamed at her question then, which Harry couldn't figure out until he later was confronted – much less bluntly – by Pansy on the matter.

"Are your guardians trea..." She stopped herself suddenly. "I'm sorry. I'm being rude."

"No, don't worry about it. It's nothing like that. We get along, we just don't...we aren't true family," Harry had hurried to reassure her, as the pieces clicked in his head. He'd known some purebloods were rather prone to...harsh punishments with their children, but he hadn't really applied it to the fact that many of his classmates were purebloods. "Christmas was a fine time, but I did get the impression that they sometimes wished they could have some time to themselves."

"My parents are like that too, sometimes." Daphne's quiet interjection was not one Harry had expected. Not because he expected her parents to be particularly doting, necessarily, but rather that she was making the admission at all. She was one of the most private people in the group, quiet and reserved, and he'd rather gotten the impression that she didn't really like him. Now, as she peered at her nails in a fashion which Harry could only attribute to some shame, he realized he might just have misunderstood her. "I think they sometimes want to be alone – not because they don't love us, of course," he quickly added at the others' look of dawning pity, "but they got married very young."

"And they had to take care of their duties," Harry murmured. She nodded, looking at him sideways, and Harry realized that she was, in her own way, apologizing for bringing up the subject with him earlier. She clearly thought he might have felt that she'd been aggressive or intrusive, which Harry could understand although he hadn't actually felt that way. She didn't want to make an enemy out of him; by revealing a bit of her personal life, a bit which might be construed into leverage if so needed, she was leveling the playing field between them. An apology, in a very careful, purposefully determined way.

Harry didn't quite know what to do with that, so he simply nodded slightly at her. Her expression shifted minutely and she turned away from the group, opening up the book she'd been holding and beginning to read. Harry caught Draco's eye as the blond assessed him carefully. The blond looked like he wanted to say something, but thought better of it and changed the subject. Harry really appreciated his often less-than-subtle approach to diplomacy; covert inter-house politics, like the ones Daphne was more adroit at, set him somewhat on edge. Draco, while discreet when he wanted to be, knew that there usually was no need for him to be so. He wielded enough power from his family name that he never needed to be particularly underhanded to achieve what he wanted; besides, even if he had been attempting to hide his true intentions, everyone would already have assumed he was planning something, simply because he was a Malfoy. As long as he did it openly, no one asked any more questions.

Harry had realized this was actually Draco's preferred strategy when being overt was not the best method – he was good at making people think he was planning one thing, when he was in fact conducting another scheme in the background. People tended to underestimate him, because of his father; not because Lucius was bad at politics – rather the opposite, in fact. Harry had read up a bit

on a few of the most powerful families in Britain at the moment, which of course included the Malfoys and, if nothing else, Lucius was a genius at getting what he wanted.

It wasn't outwardly mentioned anywhere, of course, but if one knew where to look, it was clear that he had over half the Ministry under his thumb, as well as the Board of Governors and quite a few of the law officials. He had enemies, of course, but none that Harry saw had ever been able to truly damage his reputation. Rather, Lucius excelled at destroying the opposition; Harry wondered if that was the secret to his success. Most people hesitated somewhat at the prospect of utterly destroying someone else's life; Lucius only hit harder.

It was even difficult to find any records of the people who'd attempted to go against the Malfoy patriarch; mostly old newspapers, some articles, but nothing after their initial attack. When Lucius won, he won *very* thoroughly.

Harry had to admit he admired that.

What it meant for Draco, then, was that most people assumed he relied on his father's abilities for manipulation rather than any of his own. For a reason which Harry couldn't quite fathom, he knew a lot of people considered Draco to be...well, not *stupid*, exactly, but also not particularly smart. And while Harry could understand why someone might assume that – he knew quite a few children, mostly in other Houses, who had no abilities of their own when it came to social relations and instead relied entirely on their family names – it was dangerous to assume of Draco. To be fair, he suspected the blond played it up somewhat around other people; he would often mention his father more than Harry would deem necessary or reasonable, and often modeled his behavior and logic to appear to have been entirely directed by his father. All Slytherins had a healthy fear of the blond, for a variety of reasons, but pretty much no one outside their house had much respect for him.

Harry had no idea how Draco could stand being considered incompetent, but then again there were many things the boy did which Harry didn't understand.

Breakfast was a quiet affair until Draco suddenly motioned for the rest of the group to pay attention to him.

“We're going to get a new Defense teacher,” he announced, smug as everyone else reacted with surprise at the unexpected news.

“I liked Snape as our teacher,” Harry murmured, although he knew why he wouldn't be teaching anymore. All last term Snape had been covering both subjects, and by the end of the year he'd started looking rather haggard and tired. Harry couldn't expect him to continue on with that, however much he enjoyed classes with him. He certainly expected a lot from his students, but thankfully hadn't resorted quite yet to asking them to cast spells in class. Harry had managed to cast a *Flipendo* that could throw an object a good 10 feet without also causing it to explode. Much. He counted that as a success.

“I did too, but we all know he was being severely over-worked last term,” Draco said, carefully poking at the piece of apple on his plate. “And we can always go to him for extra help if the new teacher turns out to be as incompetent as Quirrell.”

“I'm not sure that's possible,” Blaise quipped, yawning widely, as he suddenly appeared behind Harry. “Morning, everyone.”

“Morning, Blaise,” Harry said, turning curiously to the other boy. Blaise looked like he hadn't slept much, and although it was nothing compared to how Harry had looked when Snape had found him,

the dark circles under his eyes were pretty distinctive. That did not stop a group of 2nd year Slytherins from giving him dreamy looks as he took a seat next to Harry. "How was your night?"

"I stayed up late reading a bit," Blaise responded, shooting Harry a sleepy, teasing grin. "Nothing to worry your pretty little head about."

Harry sighed, feeling it was too early to gripe to the other boy and so deciding to ignore his ribbing. "What were you reading?"

"Your book," Blaise replied lazily. "The one you carry around everywhere."

Harry blinked. He knew it was a lie, not only because Blaise would never take anything of his, despite how much he teased him about it, but because he wasn't sure which book Blaise was talking about. He read a lot, but he almost never took any books around with him, much less 'everywhere'.

And Blaise had to know this – because that was just the kind of person he was – which meant he was saying something else.

It really was too early for all of this.

"Of course, that book," he replied vaguely, which was obviously not the response Blaise wanted because he was peering at Harry through slitted eyes. They sat in silence for a few moments, Blaise's expression inscrutable, before he finally moved backwards, stretching his back.

"You, dummy," he finally said, sounding somewhat disappointed that Harry hadn't caught on. "The 'book' you carry around everywhere, where all your knowledge is."

Harry frowned. "You were reading my mind?" he asked, somewhat confused. He was pretty sure that was not quite what Blaise had meant, but he was not *entirely* sure and that made him nervous.

Blaise snorted. "No," he drawled, sounding half amused and half indignant. "That would be *rude*. Despite how interesting I'm sure your mind is."

Harry rubbed at his head. "You were thinking about me?" he finally said, after a moment of trying to come up with a reasonable interpretation of Blaise's words. The other boy's smile widened.

"Good," he said, patting Harry in the head as he swatted him away. "You'll be good at this yet."

"Understanding your stupid, cryptic, entirely useless comments?" Harry asked grouchily. "What would be the point of that? Eternal boredom?"

"Oh, but *Harry*, there is too a point to them," Blaise replied, his tone honeyed as he leaned forwards. "You just don't see it yet."

"He's training you to be a politician," Draco suddenly interjected from Harry's other side, to Blaise's complaints that he'd spoiled the fun. "You're not going to succeed, Zabini. Harry refuses to play that game."

"He's got potential," Blaise all but purred as Harry pushed at his shoulder. "I've barely been doing this for a few weeks and he's already decent."

"I'm not a dog to be *trained*," Harry snapped, feeling very much like he was being made fun of. "And both of you can stop this already. I'm *not* going to be a politician."

“See what I mean?” Draco said, sighing.

“You just don't have the necessary determination.”

“And you do?”

“More than you, certainly.”

“Then I wish you all the luck; if you ever manage to succeed, I will be most impressed.” It was clear from the blond's expression he did not expect such a thing to occur. Blaise shot him a sly grin.

“What will you give me if I succeed?”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “I will give you nothing. You are doing this for your own gain; I've nothing to do with it.”

“But you do want me to succeed,” Blaise prodded, “as it would benefit you as well.”

Draco shrugged. “I don't need it that much. I think it would benefit Harry, if nothing else.”

Harry, meanwhile, was becoming annoyed at how they seemed to be talking as if he was not there. Or as if he didn't understand what they were going on about. He really hoped it was the former.

“Harry would be rather pleased if both of you considered he was listening in to all of this and might actually have some faculty of his own,” he interrupted with a deceptively sweet voice, although he was glaring at them. Blaise laughed.

“Forgive me, dear, I didn't meant to imply such a thing,” he said, his tone mellow and apologetic. Harry wasn't fooled, and he felt his annoyance flare.

“What *did* you mean to imply, then?” His voice had turned soft and sweet, but his eyes told a different story. Blaise actually hesitated for a moment before replying.

“I apologize if—”

“Blaise.” Harry's tone was quiet, his teeth just slightly too visible and his smile just slightly too wide. “What did you meant to imply?”

Blaise blinked at him for a few moments, his eyes losing their previous lightness and his posture shifting slightly, inwardly. Even more tellingly, his magic suddenly went very, very still.

“I feel that you are wasting a natural talent,” he finally answered. “And I don't like to see that. I never meant to imply that you are in any way lacking...capabilities, for I am well aware you are not. If my opinion has not been made clear in the past, then let me do so now.”

Harry did not respond for a moment longer, trying to ascertain if Blaise's apology was genuine. The dark-haired boy's posture was what eventually convinced him; it was too hunched over, too defensive to be anything but authentic. Blaise was not a submissive person by most people's standards, and he would not react this way if he was not in some way truly sorry.

Or if he had something to gain from it, but Harry couldn't imagine what Blaise might gain from this situation. He had annoyed Harry in the past and hadn't particularly cared – although that wasn't quite true, Harry amended. He was always careful not to actually hurt Harry, although he might be irked. Still, Harry didn't think this situation was all that different from then. He might be annoyed,

but he wasn't *angry*. Blaise reacted like...like he was actually worried. Scared, even.

The thought was somewhat unnerving. He'd said he wasn't going to play this game, but it seemed like he was doing it anyway.

"It's fine," he finally said, and noted with interest and quite a bit of wariness that Blaise's posture relaxed at his words, and his magic began moving once again. So he *had* been making the boy uncomfortable. "I do hope it won't happen again."

"No," Blaise immediately replied, and although his tone was back to being lazy and somewhat mocking, his shoulders were still slightly hunched, his magic's movement stilted and somewhat awkward. "It won't."

And didn't that sound ominous.

Harry decided he neither wanted nor really knew how to deal with the situation, so he merely nodded and then turned back to his breakfast. He missed the calculating looks thrown his way by the rest of the Slytherins in their group; some filled with curiosity, some with wariness, and all with some degree of anticipation.

In front of them, Dumbledore suddenly stood and called their attention.

"Good morning, students! Welcome back! Now that most of you are here, I have an announcement to make. As you are all aware, last term Professor Snape generously volunteered as your temporary Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher after the unfortunate, sudden departure of Professor Quirrell. For this term, we warmly welcome back a past member of the Hogwarts faculty. Please welcome your new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Slughorn!"

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone!

A reminder that you guys are all wonderful and so, so lovely, and that your comments always make me smile! I hope you keep enjoying this story.

Thank you so very much for reading!

Desiderium

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Come on, let’s go explore! What if there’s treasure, or some kind of legendary item? Don’t you want to check it out?”

“Of course not, Ron, it’s forbidden for a reason. We could get killed, or worse, expelled!”
Hermione’s voice pitched in frustration, belaying the fact that they’d had similar conversations multiple times before.

Ron sniffled with disdain, his nose scrunching. “Ms. Goody-two-shoes, always caring so much about the rules. I thought you wanted to know all of Hogwarts’ secrets?”

“Yes, but properly! Through reading, and not through getting myself in danger, or scolded by teachers. Imagine if we got into trouble in our first year here!” She turned and walked away, her scruffy hair almost uniformly moving with her head.

Ron’s voice turned into a whine. “But Hermione, we could just-”

Their voices faded away as Harry carefully tugged the invisibility cloak off his head and took a deep breath. Even though the cloak was light as a feather, there was something about its magical properties that seemed to smother his magic, contain it within, and it made Harry feel a little bit like he was being held underwater. It wasn’t horrible, but it definitely made him feel claustrophobic if he used it for too long.

Harry snorted at the thought, still frustrated that he was bound to using the cloak instead of his own magic to remain invisible. He’d spent multiple hours trying to figure out a similar spell, either to cast on himself or on a similar piece of fabric, but nothing worked quite the way he wanted it to.

He could make things invisible, that was relatively simple. It did, however, require a large amount of magic and concentration, as his technique required him to allow photons to pass through the material undisturbed. This was more easily said than done, especially when the material was in motion. Harry supposed it was similar to his exercise of keeping water warm while he showered; there was just so much variation, and each of the photons was at once the same and yet different, and so required different amounts of magic to control...or rather not control? Guide? Regardless, it was very draining on his magic and Harry couldn’t really keep it up for more than a few minutes.

Making himself invisible was significantly harder, for a variety of reasons. A human being was much more complex than a piece of cloth, and had significantly more layers, not to mention different densities, viscosities, states of matter, chemical compositions...the list went on and on. A fabric was largely made of the same elements, in the same states, throughout, whereas a human was most decidedly not. So, managing to control photons through his body was extremely difficult, and not something that Harry had been particularly successful with so far.

Of course, he always had *Effugiat* available if his only intention was to sneak around unnoticed, but if people were looking out for him, or already knew he was there, then it was pretty much useless.

He’d also spent the last few days pouring over two of the books that had been gifted to him over the Christmas break.

The runes book was, unfortunately, beyond his current scope of understanding. It assumed that the

reader was already fully familiar with the base set of Runes that one needed to know to learn spell creation, around 750 characters that one had to be able to recognize, write, and understand the properties of.

At this point in time, mostly thanks to his time in the Leaky Cauldron before Hogwarts, Harry had memorized and understood around 100 of the most basic symbols. So, he still had a long ways to go before he'd be able to start learning how to actually create spells. He hadn't had the time recently to focus too much on learning Runes, given his classes and friends, but he promised himself that once summer vacation started he'd focus more on that topic. He had the advantage of knowing Latin, which made it much easier, but it was still a very time consuming process -- especially if one wanted to know it well, which Harry most certainly did.

The book on bloodwands, on the other hand, had been both fascinating and a huge disappointment.

Apparently, bloodwands had been designed originally to help wizards create spells, many years ago, although no one knew by whom or why. Another detail was that bloodwands had to be 'primed' to be used. Priming involved feeding the wand the chosen user's magic until the wand was 'full', at which point the wand would be ready to begin creating spells.

Harry's initial excitement about the book quickly dwindled, however. It soon became clear that the author had no personal experience with bloodwands and had only ever seen them on display. According to him, they were extremely hard to make, extremely rare, and, most importantly, they tended to be extremely picky with their masters. In the past one thousand years, only one true case of a bloodwand-user had been documented, and due to the secretive nature of the person in question, there were very few details known. He also mentioned that there were many people that pretended to use a bloodwand, for the notoriety and fame, but they were usually found out quickly since they couldn't cast any spells with them at all.

As such, his section on 'Why you have one' was filled with childish appeasements that seemed to assume that the reader did not actually have a bloodwand in their possession. Or, if they did, that it had been acquired without the wand's consent, as a prop for fame or trophy. It gave all kinds of tips on how to polish the wand for maximum shine, and how to care for it so that it would last for centuries, rather than, oh, I don't know, how to actually *use it*. Harry supposed it made sense with how rare they were, but it still annoyed him given his present situation.

The only part that seemed like it had any sustenance was the section on priming. For one, Harry had been extremely relieved to find out that the bloodwand storing, 'eating' his spells was actually a feature, rather than a bug as he'd feared. Even then, there was a depressing lack of detail. The author had clearly only heard about the phenomenon, and had no idea what it meant by '*feeding it the user's magic*' and gave no specific - or even generic - time lapse for when the feeding would be finished.

The whole ordeal was made well worth it, however, for the one section in which the author had actually managed to find someone who had succeeded in gathering information directly from the one known bloodwand user.

The section read, in large bold lettering:

WARNING:

1. DO NOT USE ANOTHER WAND WHILE PRIMING THE BLOODWAND. MAGIC MAY BE PERMANENTLY DAMAGED.
2. ONCE STARTED, DO NOT STOP PRIMING THE BLOODWAND. STARVING THE BLOODWAND WILL DAMAGE IT IRREPARABLY.

The words had definitely scared Harry initially. He'd definitely 'stopped priming the blood wand', quite a few times, and he'd most certainly been using the Holly wand in that time period. After a while though, he'd sat down, thought about it, and reached a couple of conclusions from what he knew of his own experiences and what he'd read so far.

1. When the author said '*Don't use another wand*', Harry could only think of how his magic was reacting horribly to his Holly wand. The trouble he had with spells being both extremely over and under-powered was something he hadn't experienced in years, since back when he'd first discovered magic, and was something no other student seemed to be struggling with. His own magic, using Latin, was still fine too, so it seemed to be an issue between his magic and the wand, rather than with his magic directly. The '*magic may be permanently damaged*' part was much more concerning, and so Harry had decided that he would have to figure out some other way to perform magic in his classes.

Last year, he'd been forcing himself to use the Holly wand because he felt he had no choice, but it was true that his control was getting worse, and his spells more volatile, as time went on. He wasn't going to ignore such a serious warning, even if most of the book seemed to be gibberish. He hadn't been using the Holly wand too often before, but he was going to try and minimize its use as much as possible going forward. He wasn't going to get rid of it; Ollivander had said it was Voldemort's brother wand, and as much as that irked Harry, it also was something he was somehow oddly proud of, although he hadn't yet examined why that was. Besides, he still had to pretend to use it in classes.

As for what had already been done, we would never willingly risk the safety of his magic, and he could only hope he hadn't already irreparably damaged it. Christmas break had ended a few days ago; Harry hadn't really had much success in using magic without using the Holly wand, while still somehow making it *seem* like he was using the wand. It was a work in progress. Maybe he'd have to learn some sleight of hand; the sheer irony might be worth the hassle.

2. By '*do not stop*', Harry assumed there was some information lost in translation - so to speak, he didn't know what language the blood-wand user spoke - and they did not literally mean 'continuously hold and feed the bloodwand at all times', but rather 'feed it regularly and within a certain period of time'. In any case, Harry had started a strict schedule for the feeding of the blood wand, most times right before he went to bed, or else sometime in the night when he was alone. Feeding the bloodwand wasn't a difficult process, but it was temporarily extremely draining, both magically and physically. Thankfully, a good night's sleep usually replenished him, which was why he planned to do it when he was about to go to sleep anyways. If he knew he wasn't going to sleep for whatever reason that night, he figured he'd feed the wand less, or not at all. He'd already gone far longer without feeding it before.

The actual feeding was very simple. Harry merely had to hold the wand, and once he felt the pain that apparently indicated a working bond, he could either shove his magic into it for a few seconds, or let it passively feed on magic for a while. The first method was relatively fast, but if Harry wasn't careful he had a tendency to over-exert himself and be more tired than usual the next day. It was essentially the method he'd been using when he'd been trying to use the wand to cast spells; the wand had been trying to eat the magic Harry was casting, and had had partial success depending on the spell. He was thankful he'd tried experimenting with it so much, or he might have accidentally starved the wand before he'd found this book.

The thought made him frown. He wondered if Ollivander knew about all this...he *had* insisted that Harry take both wands after all. But then why hadn't he warned Harry about the priming? About not using the Holly wand? There was as chance he didn't know, or maybe he knew something this

author didn't. He'd have to ask him the next time he was in Diagon Alley.

The second method was slower, but more stable. If he wasn't in a hurry, he would read a book while he held the wand loosely for about an hour; the wand would slowly and passively feed on his magic, so long as he kept physical contact with it. So far, he'd used both methods a few times, and the system had been going well. He wasn't usually particularly tired the next day, although he was being careful to document the whole procedure in case he needed to change anything in the future. The idea that the bloodwand feeding off him would permanently cripple his magic had crossed his mind, but Harry didn't really think that was a real threat. The book hadn't mentioned any known negative effects from bloodwands at all, Ollivander had assured him the bloodwand would never harm him, and, most importantly, his own magic seemed to be extremely attracted to the wand, which wouldn't make sense if it was harming him.

As for the wand getting full, well...so far, he'd been doing this for a little over a week, and the bloodwand didn't seem to be slowing down whatsoever. It really felt like a bottomless void, happily devouring whatever magic Harry was willing to give it. Harry wondered if it might take months, years, or even decades, to fully prime the wand. He hoped not, but he was willing to work with it. The bloodwand was a unique enough item that Harry was extremely curious as to its capabilities, and Harry's curiosity was easily capable of making him an extremely patient person.

Similarly, it was his curiosity over the infamous forbidden third floor corridor that had brought him here tonight. Initially he hadn't really cared to seek it out, although he knew a few of the older students had been caught exploring it already, but during dinner he'd overheard Ron trying to convince Hermione to come explore with him. So, in a rare impulsive moment, Harry had decided to follow them, partially out of curiosity about the corridor, and partially as an excuse to use the cloak he'd gotten over Christmas as he assumed it was meant to be used; for sneaking around.

Ron and Hermione had disappeared into the rest of the castle, presumably going back to the Gryffindor dormitory, but Harry continued on his adventure. Finally, he reached the third floor, making sure to re-cast *Silencio*, just in case, so that Filch and Mrs. Norris wouldn't hear his footsteps. He wandered about for a while, unsure of why exactly this corridor was forbidden, when suddenly he could feel his magic reacting to something close by. A strange, alluring, pervading sort of feeling, almost like an extremely faint scent. It seemed to waft towards him, swept on an intangible wind, iron and ozone and ashes; and Harry allowed himself to be lead.

He wasn't usually the type to allow magic to make him do anything, but he was curious enough as to what this could be that he was willing to let it go just this once. A small voice in the back of his head warned that maybe being pulled in by the magic was exactly why this corridor was forbidden, and that what he found at the end might be extremely dangerous, but the strange, captivating pull didn't let him dwell on those thoughts. He was being lured, and before he knew what was happening he was standing before a door to a classroom, inconspicuous as any other. Harry could feel his magic pulsing in his veins.

Before opening the door, he took a deep breath to steady himself. "*Tegmentum*," he whispered, letting the spell settle over his body. He may be curious, but he wasn't stupid. He then opened the door slowly, peeking his head in for a moment to make sure nothing immediately malicious lay inside; when everything seemed fine, he went in, and closed the door behind him.

Harry took a moment to look carefully around the room. It seemed like a regular classroom, except it was empty; no chairs, no desks, no board, no stands, nothing.

Well, not exactly *nothing*. There was one object, standing ominously in the middle of the room; its

magic seemed to be almost grafted to its outside, like a separate gilding layer; largely immobile, and Harry could only see small shift in sections, like plates on chain-mail.

It was a mirror.

Harry peered at it curiously, his eyes narrowing. It didn't seem dangerous, but Harry could come up with a dozen ways that a magical mirror could hurt him off the top of his head. Would looking into it turn him to stone, Medusa-style? Maybe it would steal his soul, rendering him stuck inside the mirror forever? Or maybe it would create an evil clone of him, which would proceed to--

Harry once again focused, suddenly noticing his feet had taken him in front of the mirror without a conscious thought. The realization terrified a small, quieted part inside him; it felt like it was being muffled by a thick cloth, preventing Harry from panicking even as he felt himself look, unwittingly, into his eyes reflected in the mirror.

Harry blinked, feeling himself frown.

That wasn't *quite* right, though. In the mirror he saw himself, certainly, but something was definitely different. Harry's clothes, height, build, appearance were all the same but...

His expression was...happier? Content? Almost smug, in a way. It certainly didn't fit the way he felt at the moment, which Harry would have described as mostly annoyed and somewhat worried. The person in the mirror wasn't him, Harry could tell, just from the way he held himself, the emotion he projected so clearly into Harry's soul. Or, it was him, but a different version of him?

Harry felt his mouth twist in disgust. Something about the other Harry's face rubbed him the wrong way; he couldn't even explain quite why, but something about its expression just really bothered him, in an almost visceral way.

He turned his gaze away from his reflection, now finally taking in the rest of the mirror. It was framed in gold, and clawed feet held it aloft. Writing near the top suddenly caught Harry's attention.

Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi.

Harry squinted, wondering for a moment if it was in a foreign language. Then it clicked.

"I show not your face but your heart's desire."

Harry brought his eyes back down to his reflection, which was still peering at him with that same strange, smug look. He tilted his head.

"Who are you?" Harry mused. "What are you?"

His reflection didn't respond.

Harry awoke the next morning feeling a headache creeping up behind his eyes. He'd stayed up last night until the wee hours of the morning, trying to figure out what that mirror had been showing him.

As far as he could tell, it was just him, looking somewhat happy. His mouth twisted. Surely that

was not the depths of his ‘heart’s desire’? He didn’t even look *that* happy, just kind of..smug.

But, to be honest, the more Harry thought about it, he couldn’t think of what he would have actually expected to see in that mirror. Money? He already had that, and didn’t really care about it except for that it made his life easy. Being famous? He already was, and besides, Harry hated notoriety. A huge library, full of books? A good option, but something about it felt lacking. He had access to pretty much every book he’d think to want so far, and it wasn’t like books themselves were what he liked, just the knowledge they contained, which could be gained from any number of sources. Friends? He had those too, now, and he liked them, he really did, but he wouldn’t be devastatingly, horrifyingly sad if they all stopped being friends. He’d want to know why, of course, but Harry was too used to being alone to be particularly troubled at the thought of not having friends. It was how he’d lived the majority of his life, after all.

A part of Harry quietly wondered why he didn’t see his parents, and what that said about him.

He dismissed that part of him with some annoyance. He’d never been particularly sad at their deaths, and he wasn’t going to start pretending to now. Yes, his life with them would have been better, but it would have been better with practically anybody other than the Dursleys. Besides, once he’d figured out his magic, he’d found a silver lining to not having parents, who would have surely worried over him, and who he’d have had to hide everything from, and pretend to be someone he wasn’t to keep them safe.

Like Sandy.

Harry shook his head. It was no use thinking about these kinds of things, he chided himself, checking the time and beginning to get ready. Draco yawned from the bed next to him, peering at him with annoyance and grumbling at *morning people* as Harry gave him a cheerful grin that he didn’t really feel.

His smile turned more genuine as he began to make plans for going to the library to try and find out more information on the mirror. He didn’t have a lot to go on, but the mirror certainly looked and felt like a rare, if not unique, magical object with interesting and complex properties. He wanted to go back to the room and experiment, but to do that he first needed to arm himself with more knowledge. Last night he had allowed himself to be lured, but now...

Harry frowned, straightening his tie and proceeded to walk out into the Common Room. What in Merlin’s name had that been about, anyways? He knew he’d been under some kind of compulsion, had felt it pull at his thoughts and prod at his decision making, had almost felt it tugging at his magic itself, waving around him and leading him towards the mirror. He swallowed. Surely it wasn’t evil? He really need to research more about it, if he was going to go back and look.

“Why are you frowning so much? It doesn’t suit your pretty face.”

Harry was dragged out of his musings by Blaise’s teasing voice. He turned with an annoyed huff.

“Good morning to you too, Blaise.”

Blaise’s grin faltered, looking somewhat surprised. “I’m surprised you can tell the sun is up.”

Harry closed his eyes. He wasn’t in the mood to deal with a playful Blaise so early in the morning, especially not after getting a solid one hour of sleep last night. He gave himself a mental pat in the back for managing to sneak in that hour, Snape would have been proud.

Well, maybe not proud, but he was trying. Seriously!

Harry gave a long-suffering sigh. “What are you talking about?”

Blaise had the gall to look ever so slightly genuinely worried. Which meant *Harry* was starting to get worried.

“The bags under your eyes make you look like you got punched, Potter. When was the last time you slept?”

Harry blinked. “Last night, actually.” He wasn’t even lying.

Blaise gave him an unimpressed look, and Harry marveled at how much it reminded him of Draco. He really had picked up the wrong habits from the blond boy.

“Allow me to rephrase. When was the last time you slept for longer than 6 hours?” Harry opened his mouth. “Continuously?”

He was saved from having to figure out the answer to that question - which was in its own way an answer - by Draco choosing that moment to come down the stairs. Harry made a small mental note to see if he could figure out some kind of spell to mask how tired he looked - he’d heard Daphne and Pansy discussing ‘glamours’ or something similar a few days ago, so he knew they existed - and then quickly sidled up to Draco with a bright smile. The blonde gave him a weird look, before noticing Blaise’s slightly annoyed expression behind him and deciding that he wanted no part in this, and therefore made no comment on it as he walked out of the Slytherin dorms. Harry counted it all as a win.

Harry was displeased.

No, displeased was putting it lightly. He was annoyed, frustrated. Downright *miffed*.

“Britain’s largest library, they said. Greatest library in the continent, *maybe the world*,” he grumbled in a mocking tone, then sighed, closing the book in front of him. “Ok, it’s a great library, but seriously? Nothing?”

“What are you muttering to yourself about now?” Draco’s disinterested drawl came from behind him; Harry could tell that he was faking it though. He was always interested in Harry’s little research quests, as much as he tried to pretend he wasn’t.

Harry hadn’t told Draco anything about the mirror he’d found. It wasn’t that he didn’t trust the other boy, but rather that he didn’t trust the mirror. It had been a week, and he still hadn’t really figured out how he’d been lured to go and find it, and he hadn’t been able to find any information that could tell him whether the mirror was dangerous or not. He didn’t want to risk anyone else’s safety if he could help it.

That being said, the mirror *was* being stored in Hogwarts, a school for young children, in an unlocked classroom which was perfectly accessible to anyone.

On the other hand, Dumbledore *had* made it expressly clear that it was forbidden for anyone to go into that area, under threat of potential, painful death.

So Harry was definitely getting some mixed signals on the ‘how dangerous is this mirror’ area.

He'd considered going to Dumbledore with his questions, seeing as he'd found the mirror by accident (some might say he'd found it against his own will) but he was scared of two things: one, that Dumbledore might be angry enough to expel him, as Hermione had feared; or two, that the mirror might be removed from the castle before Harry had a chance to find out more things about it.

In any case, he didn't think it could be too extremely dangerous; there were literally no safety measures around it, after all, or at least none that Harry had run into or been able to detect. But if his experiments had taught him anything, it was that it was better to be over than under-prepared.

He decided that he might as well ask Draco about the mirror. It wasn't like he would tell the blonde that it was here, but just see if he'd heard anything about it in general.

"Draco, have you ever heard about a mirror that shows you your heart's desire?"

Draco's brow furrowed in thought. "Yes, actually," he said after a few seconds. "I think I read about something like that a few years ago. The '*Mirror of Erised*', I believe it was called. Why do you ask?"

Harry smiled lightly, doing his best to come across as unconcerned, while inside his heart started to beat faster. "Just something I found in a book. What does it do?"

Draco gave him a slightly suspicious look, but then shrugged. "I don't remember the exact details, but essentially it shows you what you believe would be your ideal life situation. It doesn't have to be a conscious desire, and in fact many people said that theirs was an unconscious wish."

Harry frowned, pretending not to understand. "What do you mean? Like, if you wanted to be rich it would show you with piles of money?"

"Something like that. I remember reading that it varies a ton between people, especially the older you get." Draco then paused. "Also, that to the happiest man on earth, someone who wants nothing, it would act like a normal mirror, just showing him himself."

Harry felt his heart stutter. The mirror had showed him himself, practically exactly the same, but...

"Is it dangerous?" His voice had quieted. Draco shook his head.

"No, from what I know its only function is to show you that image. It doesn't do anything like possess you." He paused. "Although, there are stories about people wasting away and dying in front of the mirror because the image it showed them was too overpowering."

"What do you mean? How could that ever happen?"

Draco considered for a moment. "They're just stories, but, well, say your child died due to a mistake you made. There's no way to bring them back, and it's the greatest regret of your life. Then, the mirror shows you with your child, alive and well, happy and loving. Literally the biggest desire of your heart. Someone might chose to stare at the mirror and live in that fantasy forever, rather than go back to a life in which that child is dead."

Harry frowned. "But your child is still dead. Staring at the mirror isn't going to bring them back." He gave a small scoff. "My parents are dead, and looking at a picture of them won't suddenly make me want to...I don't know...stop my life and stare at it. You can't even touch them, or talk to them, what's the big deal?"

Draco looked a bit shocked, then he snorted daintily. "I forget sometimes how...cold-hearted you

are.”

Harry puffed up in frustration. “I’m not! It’s just impractical, and stupid! If there was a chance to bring them back, I’d understand, but you’re literally just looking at an image! What’s the difference between looking at a picture of what you most desire and looking in the mirror? What, if I show them a portrait of their child they’ll just keel over and die? Then they would have done so already!” Draco had started laughing and Harry reigned in his indignation, crossing his arms over his chest. “Surely they are just exaggerating.”

“I suppose that’s the case, then, if you say so,” Draco replied, a smirk still tugging at his lips. “Come on then, lunch is almost over and we have Charms now.”

Harry suppressed a curse as he started to put the books back. He was still having great difficulty with using his magic in class. He’d managed to get by so far by secretly casting spells in Latin when he figured something that was similar enough, or else simply pretending to be unable to cast the spell at all. However, he knew that he wouldn’t be able to get away with it when the exams at the end of the year happened. He’d have to figure something out before then, or he’d be in trouble.

“I’m back, *Fraus*!” Harry called in a sing-song voice as he gently closed the door to the classroom behind him. He let the invisibility cloak fall to the floor from his shoulders, and cast a quick *Monere Accessus* to make sure he wouldn’t be surprised if any other person were also out exploring.

He then turned to look at his reflection. “Or should I say, *Mirror of Erised*?”

He wasn’t sure what he expected. Maybe for his reflection to be shocked that he’d figured out the secret, a little wary - at least look a little bit surprised. Instead, it just looked on at him like normal. Harry couldn’t help but bristle. Something about the small, smug smile seemed to be almost goading him, like his reflection knew something he didn’t. Worse, like he had no intention of telling him.

Beneath his arm Harry held a few small silver mirrors he’d created last night for this exact purpose. They weren’t as clear as he’d ideally like, but *Fies* transformed materials directly, so even though the parchment he’d used as the base was relatively flat, he’d still had to use *Polio* a few times to get it down to an actually reflective surface. As long as his face was identifiable, it would do for now.

Harry adjusted the small mirrors, irritated. “Just give me some time, I’m going to figure out how you work, and then I’m going to make another one of you. Multiple others, even. You won’t be so special then, hm?” His reflection gave a small, soundless chuckle, shaking its head. Harry scowled at it, feeling patronized and hating it. “That wasn’t even funny. Stop laughing.”

His reflection ignored him. He shot it another glare. The fact that it was wearing his face was really getting to him. “You know what, you aren’t me, so calling you ‘fake me’ is annoying. I’m going to call you...Henry from now on.”

Henry squinted at him, his mouth twitching. Harry could tell he was still being laughed at. He decided to ignore it for now and start thinking on how he would replicate the mirror.

He placed the mirrors he’d brought on the floor, and then proceeded to pace in front of the mirror for

a few minutes, observing. The magic was exactly the same as last time, kind of oddly shifting in discreet amounts, a lightly pinkish gold hue to it. The feeling it gave off was very muted, almost plain. The main impression Harry got from it was that the spell used to create this mirror was made up of a lot of smaller spells grafted together, a bit crudely but still solidly.

Nothing particularly helpful to Harry in this situation, but definitely interesting to keep in mind. Harry had always been extremely careful to keep his spells simple and short; one wrong word, or the wrong combination of words, even by accident, would quickly result in disaster. It was part of the reason he was so interested in Runes and spell creation; it would allow him to eventually - hopefully- create much more complex spells without fearing that any small mistake would get him killed. For now, however, he was limiting himself as much as possible.

He began to walk around the mirror, hoping maybe there were other inscriptions he had missed, or something that would give him some kind of clue as to how this mirror worked. To his frustration, he found nothing new, and so was back to square one.

‘*Mirror of Erisèd*’, the mirror that shows one’s heart’s desire.

Harry crossed his arms, sighing deeply. To be honest, Harry had no idea what words he could possibly use to create something like the Mirror of Erisèd. It was just an extremely complex kind of idea in the first place; what was a desire? Was it different from a want? A need? In which way? How could the Mirror tell? Was it objectively correct, or could it be tricked? What if there were multiple desires? What if there were multiple, conflicting desires? Was there such a thing as one true desire? Could one’s desire as shown in the Mirror change, or was it set for life? Not to even begin to think about his ‘heart’s deepest desire’. Harry couldn’t even begin to imagine what his own deepest desire was, how could this mirror tell?

So many questions, so few answers.

Well, he wasn’t going to get anywhere thinking about it. So, Harry picked up one of his mirrors, and began to experiment.

Five hours later, Harry collapsed onto the floor, leaning back onto his hands and feeling somewhat defeated. He stared down at his pile of mirrors: some broken, some warped, a couple of them even better and shinier than in the beginning; none of them magical.

“What am I even doing here?” he murmured.

He’d been trying different things for hours; from the most abstract words - *Desderium, Desiderio meo, Ostende, Ostende mihi*, even something like *Cor meum* - to the simplest words that he felt could possibly work -- *Recrepo, Imago, Revelare, Revelare Mei*. Nothing worked. The abstract words were just that, abstract, and he knew that there was no point in even casting them because his magic had never responded to abstract words like that before, but he really had nothing to go on. Forcing his magic to go through with the spell had merely caused one of the mirrors to explode from the unfiltered magic Harry had shot at it. His *Tegmentum* had prevented any injuries, thankfully.

Somehow worse were the simple words - some part of Harry thought that maybe something like *Revelare* would work, but he only felt stupider at having the hope. What was he even expecting the

spell to do? He wasn't hiding from the mirrors in the first place, what were they going to reveal? His underwear?

He also didn't want to cast something like *Revelare Cor*, for fear that it would just rip his heart out of his chest to 'reveal it'. What a funny misunderstanding that would be! *Oops, there go my entrails.*

And having Henry watching him, laughing silently as he struggled for hours, was not helping matters at all.

He couldn't help talking to it, even when it never responded. Maybe *because* it never responded, Harry amended. It helped to take out some of his frustration, even though in hindsight it really only seemed to make him even angrier. He was this close to breaking the Mirror and damning the consequences.

Harry sighed. Why was he getting so worked up over all this? It wasn't even a useful object; sure it could be cool to know what people's desires were, but it wasn't really anything more than a party trick. Harry felt like most people's desires were relatively obvious, if one knew where to look, or at least nothing too extraordinary. Sure, some people might have images that surprised them, or the people around them, but overall he felt like it would just be a matter of asking the right questions, observing someone properly. Getting rid of misconceptions, stop denying your true wants, that kind of thing. Sure, the mirror might make the process of self-discovery simpler, but so did therapists; that didn't make them magical, mythical artifacts.

Or, in his case, the mirror was completely useless because he couldn't even figure out what his desire even was in the first place. *Charades therapist, coming right up*, Harry thought grumpily. He gently tapped at the left claw of the mirror with his foot, humming pensively.

So what if he managed to replicate the mirror? It wasn't like he could show it to other people, they'd want to know how he got it, and want to take it away from him. It would only cause trouble, and he already knew what his own desire was, in any case. So why was he wasting so much time on something he had no use for?

That thought in particular made him scoff, and he laughed quietly. "Stupid question. I guess it's always fun just to know more...even if I'm never going to use it." He peered into the mirror again, squinting at Henry. Henry squinted back at him. "I know you can't speak, but come on, can't you just...mime it? Write something down?" He looked around for a piece of paper. None could be seen. He groaned.

"Aren't you a magic mirror that can show me anything?" he said, goading, his words mocking and high pitched. "I *totally* swear my heart's deepest desire right now is to know what your secret is. I just want to know, I won't even tell anyone! Pinky promise!" He definitely felt like he'd maybe lost his mind a little, talking to - at - his reflection for hours on end. Henry, as always, didn't respond. "I won't even use it! Just show me, pretty please?"

Suddenly, the mirror gave an odd sort of pulse from in front of him.

It was the first time the mirror's magic had shifted so clearly. It shone with a ghostly silhouette; a faint, almost iridescent mirage at the edges of the golden frame.

Just as suddenly, it was dark again, and he felt a small weight settle in the right pocket of his robe.

Harry shot up onto his feet, his heart racing, reaching into his robe pocket and pulling out...a small stone?

It looked somewhat underwhelming compared to what Harry was expecting, if he was being honest - a red, shiny rock with a strange, crackling, swirling core - but Harry could tell there was something intensely powerful about it. He couldn't see its magic, but there seemed to be a weight to it that transcended its physical gravity, a density that pulsed at its amber core and pulled, pulled at Harry. He recognized that pull.

Is this what was luring me in all this time?

Harry stared at the stone, feeling a shiver slowly creep up his spine the more he tried to understand what it was. He looked up at the mirror, catching sight of his reflection which, for once, looked entirely serious.

Its eyes were focused entirely on the stone; a piercing, deeply unsettling stare. It looked like it wanted to devour it.

Harry swallowed thickly, putting the stone back in his pocket. Henry's eyes followed the movement without blinking once.

Harry quickly picked up the cloak from the floor, threw it around his shoulders, and left the room without looking back.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, that line at the supermarket is no joke!

But in all seriousness, I'm back! It's been a long time, oh boy. Believe me, this story NEVER stopped being on my mind.

To be honest, I had a really tough time with figuring out how to move forward with this story for a long time, and I couldn't find the time to work on this + studies + work + relationship, and rather than give you all mediocre updates I decided to put it on the back burner until I felt like I could really focus on it and write something I was proud of. I hope this doesn't disappoint!

I've been working on the next few updates for around two months; I have a bunch of chapters that are almost ready to put out, so please look forward to it!

I will also be doing some minor edits here and there in previous chapters. The overarching plot has undergone a bit of a revision, so a few teeny details have to be changed, but for the most part everything will stay the same. I just wanted to let you guys know in case anyone notices something is different.

To everyone who's read this story over the years I put it on hold; thank you so much for the continuous love you've shown. I love writing, and knowing that other people enjoy reading my work is all that I could ever want. I've always read each and every comment, and appreciated every single bookmark and kudos you guys gave. Words can never express how much they all mean to me, how much having you all along with me on the journey that is writing this means to me.

I'm sorry for how long I made you wait.

And, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for reading!

<3

Lapis

Chapter Notes

Note published on March 16th, 2020:

Hello everyone!

As I mentioned, the plot has undergone a pretty sizable revision, so I've had to make some minor updates to certain parts of the story, as well as the tags and summary. For the most part it's all QoL, but there is one thing I needed to completely change retroactively, and that is Harry's ability to use the Holly Wand. To read the biggest change in that, please check out CH9, the last scene, and the first scene in CH11. In case you don't want to re-read anything, just know that he has a lot of trouble with controlling the magic output from the holly wand from day 1, and was never able to use it safely.

Other than that, it was pointed out to me last chapter that it would be nice to have an overview of what got updated. Below is a list of chapters and a 'title' to what scene the change is in. Please let me know if you have any questions!

Updated: CH2-Sandy // 3-Bank // 4-Ollivander // 6-Ollivander // 8-Introductions// 9-End// 11-Wand&11-Pledge// 12-Snape

Thank you for reading :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Harry turned the stone around in his hand, letting his magic surround it and feel it out. There was something so strange, and yet somehow familiar, about the stone, like a memory from his childhood that tickled at his subconscious, but was just out of his grasp. Part of him wanted to experiment with it, figure out what it did, satisfy his curiosity. Why he felt so drawn to this stone, why it was calling out to him.

But the other part of him wondered why the stone had called to him in the first place. Why he could still feel something about it pulling at him, at his magic. It worried Harry, that this was some kind of cursed object, like a siren, that once used would drain his life out and render him dead or catatonic. He wasn't sure which would be worse.

It had been a week since he'd obtained the stone, and he hadn't yet gone back to the mirror. The strange urge to investigate it had abated once he'd gotten the stone, and wasn't that interesting? Maybe that was what Henry had been laughing at all this time.

He lay back onto his bed, letting the light from *Illuminare* pierce through the stone as he held it above his head. Surely Henry wouldn't want to hurt Harry? If he was indeed some manner of reflection of Harry's deepest desire, he couldn't imagine it actively trying to hurt him. But then again, it was in the fabled forbidden corridor so what did Harry know? He huffed in frustration. He was getting nowhere fast, thinking in circles about exactly how dangerous the mirror and this stone could be. He really wished Dumbledore had given him a bit more information than just 'you will die' about the corridor. Maybe 'you will die, by stoning!' or 'the mirror is a lie!'. Harry was open to possibilities.

His magic poked and prodded at the stone, seemingly trying to get it to respond in some way, like a kitten trying to get a tiger to play with it. The scent from the stone seemed to almost curl into his senses, the ozone particularly strong, but the odd combination of ashes and iron was also pervading, unique. The combination pulled at his memory, teased an entirely different kind of smell from the depths of his mind. Summer, citrus, sweetness that was almost crystalline and liquid.

Suddenly, the flavor materialized in his throat, and Harry shot up in bed.

Apple.

He recognized that feeling, that *taste*. He hadn't thought about it in a good while, because he hadn't had to make food for himself since he'd been at Hogwarts, but he knew that *pull*.

Making food had been Harry's most interesting achievement with magic, in his opinion. For the most part it was limited to apples, and indeed, he'd studied apple biology and chemistry exclusively for weeks to be able to make what he considered a passable, edible fruit that looked and tasted like an apple. It had been incredibly complicated and required a lot of concentration initially, but by the time he'd come to Hogwarts he had good enough control over it that he could grab pretty much any wood-derived object and make it into a passable apple.

Or at the very least, passable apple flesh. He couldn't really give it skin, or a stem, or a core...so maybe passable 'apple' wasn't necessarily correct, but he could make passable apple spheres. And if he cut it into slices, he could even probably fool other people into thinking they were real apples, too.

The base item needed to be 'wood-derived' because it meant that the molecular ingredients were essentially all already there, compared to if he tried to make it from metal, or rock. He 'only' had to reorganize some molecules, accelerate a few processes, reshape the general mass, and he had an apple, compared to having to completely alter every single atom. It was a similar process to when he healed a wound, in that he wasn't exactly creating anything new, but rather guiding what was already there to where he wanted it, how he wanted it. The purer the wood, the easier it was.

The interesting part was, his magic had sometimes felt particularly odd when he was making apples. Harry hadn't been sure why, until he'd realized that some of his apples had cores.

And sometimes, within those cores were seeds.

And, in theory, seeds meant life.

With that in mind, and some trepidation, Harry had tried once or twice to plant the seeds and see if they grew into trees. He hadn't had any success, however; the seeds never sprouted, and remained in their little pods no matter how much he watered them, left them in the sun, gave them soil. After a while Harry had given up on the whole project, deciding that the seeds were not actual seeds, but rather small hard nubs that merely had the appearance of seeds; his magic was attempting to follow his intent to make a true 'apple', but it just wasn't really succeeding.

But now, the odd flicker in his magic, the call of ozone, was too familiar. And Harry wondered suddenly if the strange feeling when creating seeds was his magic actually, genuinely attempting to create life.

The thought had occurred to him before, certainly, but Harry had never before had it while staring at a swirling stone, dense and crackling with invisible, unknowable magical power, that seemed to pull at him insistently.

He stared at it.

Can this stone create life?

It seemed too outrageous to consider. Harry had read enough to know that truly creating life with magic was considered virtually impossible. Transmutation was temporary, and paintings were at best an extremely limited imitation; nothing else came even close. Harry's apples were already strange and unique, even if they were infertile. There were no plants no matter how rare, no animals no matter how powerful, and no treasures no matter how ancient, that were known to be capable of creating life.

But he did vaguely remember reading something about a stone.

'The ancient study of alchemy is concerned with making the Philosopher's Stone, a legendary substance with astonishing powers. The Stone will transform any metal into pure gold. It also produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal. Only one has ever been made successfully, created 600 years ago by the Great Master Alchemist, Nicholas Flamel.'

Harry sighed, turning the page of the library book. He hadn't been entirely correct, but he was closer than he would've liked to be. Of course, there was still the possibility that he was wrong, and that the stone he'd gotten from the mirror had nothing to do with the fabled Philosopher's Stone, but the picture that the book contained looked too similar for it to just be a coincidence. Either this stone was an extremely good imitation that also somehow held incredible, awe-inspiring power...or it was the real thing. And Harry was not about to take any risks in his assumptions.

Still, it could have been worse. He was relieved that the stone wasn't anything evil; but on the other hand, it seemed like he really had acquired an object that was not only extremely powerful, but highly sought after and therefore dangerous by association. Dumbledore's warning made more sense now, too. It wasn't meant to keep the children safe, but rather to keep the stone safe. Harry shook his head. Clearly Dumbledore had no idea how children, curious children especially, worked.

The thought made him frown. He had to take the stone back to the mirror. Harry hadn't taken it on purpose, but the idea that Dumbledore would find out he had it and assume he had stolen it truly scared him. Furthermore, he'd have to explain that he'd found the mirror, already going against school rules, and then explain that he'd tried to experiment with the mirror for hours. All the while swearing up and down that he hadn't wanted the stone or the mirror, he was just curious? Fat chance anyone believed that, especially after the situation with Quirrell last year. Dumbledore was already suspicious from how Harry had known about the face, and Harry certainly didn't want to give him any further reason to suspect him of anything.

But Henry's expression when he'd seen the stone made him nervous. Harry had no idea what that had been about. For the most part, Henry had always looked calm, relatively benign if a bit smug. At worst it had always just teased at Harry, mocked him silently. Harry had no idea what it found so funny, but it hadn't ever really bothered him.

But when Henry had looked at the stone, it had changed entirely. There was suddenly a hunger

present in its eyes, a desire; and Harry hadn't realized that the mirror could even show that kind of emotion. It seemed to go against its logic, but perhaps he simply didn't understand it well enough. Maybe it just wasn't as powerful as it pretended to be, and faking the Philosopher's Stone, even as an image, was beyond its limits.

Even so, it was strange that Henry had seemed so set on it, given that it was meant to be a reflection of Harry's greatest desire. Harry could understand the value of the stone, of course, but he certainly didn't feel any incredible need to use it, or even keep it. He wasn't in denial, either; he wasn't saying he didn't want the stone at all, it just wasn't worth the potential dangers it would bring with it. If anyone ever found out Harry had the stone, he was almost certain he would be receiving death threats within a week. A stone that could make you both immortal *and* rich beyond your wildest dreams? Harry would be surprised if he didn't get threats within a *day*.

Besides that, there was something that was bothering Harry particularly about what he'd read. Allegedly, the stone had been created by an Alchemist, Nicholas Flamel, over 600 years ago. So why had no one made another?

Harry had initially kind of assumed the stone was some kind of primordial object, that had existed beyond the age of man and so, reasonably, had powers beyond imaging. But instead, it had turned out to be man-made, and therefore perfectly reproducible. Really, it seemed impossible that only one person in the history of time had been able to create an item like that, either by luck or skill. Surely there were enough people who wanted it that the method could not have been completely lost in the first place, or else that no one else could have discovered it anew. But perhaps it required a magical animal that had gone extinct? Or perhaps the materials that were required to make it were so scarce that only enough for one had ever been found? It was certainly possible, but it all just seemed like too good of a coincidence, an excuse to stop people from even trying to make it rather than an actual reason. But then again, Harry really didn't know anything about it so maybe he was just being overly suspicious. He didn't actually want another stone, but just knowing that making one was possible had piqued his curiosity, and Harry knew that he'd always have the thought of it in the back of his mind now, even if he never figured it out.

But the way Henry had reacted to seeing the stone wasn't something he could ignore as easily. Harry had never really thought much of his reflection in the mirror, treating it almost like a joke since the first time he'd seen it. It had been clear to Harry since the moment they'd met eyes that Henry wasn't really him, even if they looked and dressed identically. There was just something about its expressions, its manner of being, that were odd and unfamiliar, irreconcilable to the way Harry perceived himself. It was like someone had grabbed Harry's image and then placed someone else in his body, someone who knew nothing of him and had no intention of even trying to pretend to be him. It was deeply unsettling, to look at himself and feel like he couldn't recognize the person looking back, even when by all means he should have been able to. Henry was supposed to be him, after all. In a way, Henry was supposed to be the purest, deepest part of him, revealed for him to see plainly. If he couldn't recognize his own image, his deepest desire, even when it was so clear to see then did Harry even know himself at all?

And so, the reason he couldn't get past the way Henry had reacted to the stone was that in that moment, when Henry's eyes focused on what Harry was holding, his entire countenance had changed. He had looked unspeakably moved, yearning in a way that Harry couldn't even begin to name but somehow could still identify perfectly, because it was a longing he knew intimately. He still wasn't sure what exactly Henry represented, what exactly the Mirror was trying to show him, but...

...but at least in that moment, Harry could finally recognize the Mirror's reflection as being himself.

Harry closed the door quietly behind him, his nervousness preventing him from making any jokes towards Henry even as a way to ease the tension coursing through him. Now that the stone wasn't part of the mirror, the pull was absent too, and Harry had realized he didn't actually know where the mirror was. Thankfully, '*Dirige me Mirror of Erised*' worked, even though Harry had been worried there would be some kind of spell on it preventing it from being found. He suspected there actually was, but it just didn't work against his specific kind of magic.

He released a breath in relief as he let the cloak fall from his shoulders. He still couldn't get used to the way it seemed to muffle his surroundings, smothering his magic, but he was slowly growing more accustomed to it, and no longer had to constantly fight the urge to hyperventilate.

He turned towards the mirror. Henry's face, smug as ever, greeted him, and Harry's expression twisted in annoyance and faint disgust. Part of him had forgotten what Henry had looked like in the beginning, so focused was he with the shift that had happened last time. He'd half expected, maybe hoped, that the change would be permanent. But clearly that wasn't how the mirror worked, and Harry felt he was being mocked by it for even considering the idea, as silly as that was. He opened his mouth to accuse Henry of knowing about the stone, of toying with him, when out of the corner of his eyes he caught sight of something that made the breath catch in his throat.

White.

A flicker of pure, unnaturally white magic flickered in his periphery, and he turned in alarm towards a corner of the room which had always been empty before.

His eyes met Dumbledore's, also startled.

Harry felt his breath go shallow.

They stood there in silence for a moment, before Dumbledore gently smiled. He stood from the stool he'd been occupying, slowly straightening his robes. Harry had the distinct feeling that he was trying to be as unassuming and non-threatening as possible, like Harry was a startled deer. He certainly felt like one.

"I see you've been using your father's cloak," Dumbledore said. It seemed like a question, somehow.

Harry nodded carefully. He had expected Dumbledore to accuse him, to ask him why he was there. Not talk about the cloak. Something occurred to him. "Were you the one who gave it to me, sir?"

"Indeed. He left it in my care many years ago, but I felt like it was time for it to be passed onto you once again."

Harry bowed his head slightly. "Thank you, sir. I appreciate having something of my parents'. I don't really have much to remember them by." It wasn't a lie, exactly, but Harry was laying it on a bit thick with the hope that Dumbledore would go easy on him out of pity.

Dumbledore placed his hands behind his back as he took a step towards the mirror. "So, tell me my boy, what brings you here this evening?" The words were kind, soft. There wasn't any accusation, merely curiosity. It made Harry nervous.

He took a moment to consider his next words.

"I found this mirror a few days ago, by accident. I didn't know what it was, but I was so curious I had to come check it out again," he said, putting on his best 'innocent but determined' expression. Dumbledore already thought he was too curious for his own good, so he might as well run with it.

Dumbledore peered at him for a moment. "Do you know what this mirror is, Harry?"

Harry shook his head. "No, sir. I've never heard of anything like it."

Dumbledore nodded softly. "Tell me, Harry. What do you see when you look into this mirror?"

Harry took a deep breath. This was clearly a test. Dumbledore obviously knew what the mirror was, and knew that what Harry saw was a strong indicator of his personality.

This was a great chance for him to strongly influence how Dumbledore saw him. He couldn't say the truth, for various reasons. For one, if Harry said he just saw his own reflection, Dumbledore would instantly assume he was lying, that Harry was trying to pretend like this was a normal mirror. It was ironic that the truth would come across as a bad lie, but it was the cards Harry had been dealt with.

An idea occurred to him. It was a good option. Solid, believable, and would make Dumbledore's opinion of him extremely positive. It was definitely the best choice he'd come up with.

It left a bitter taste in his mouth.

"...my parents," Harry replied after a few minutes, turning to give Henry what he hoped was a believable longing look. He had to fight the grimace that usually came forth when Henry laughed soundlessly at him. "I see my parents standing around me, smiling, hugging me." He took a deep breath, turning back to Dumbledore. "Is that what this mirror does? Show you your parents?"

He could tell that Dumbledore had fallen for the play hook, line and sinker when his expression turned fond, a little sad, regretful. His magic went momentarily still, but then also softened. "Not exactly, Harry. You see," he waved in its direction. "This mirror is a most wondrous object. It shows you not your face, but your heart's desire."

Harry pretended to feel shock. "My heart's desire? What does that mean?" He felt a bit of *deja vu* from acting like this in front of Draco.

Dumbledore smiled softly at him. "Well, my boy. You see your parents, yes? Then it seems like what you desire most, your heart's desire, is indeed your family. Their love, their support." His expression became forlorn. "They would have been very proud of you, Harry. They were lovely people."

Something about Dumbledore's words made the breath catch in Harry's throat. He swallowed dryly, nodding as he stared at his feet. "Thank you, sir."

They stood in silence before Harry looked up, questioningly. "Sir, what do you see?"

Dumbledore's expression stayed calm, but his magic gave a telling jerk. "That's a very personal question, my boy."

Harry blinked. "You asked me first, sir." he said, doing his best to hide his incredulity. The audacity.

“So I did.” Dumbledore replied with a small chuckle, before he then turned to the mirror.

It was for but an instant, that Harry saw a deep, bone-weary sadness suddenly flicker across Dumbledore’s face. His magic, for the first time Harry had seen, seemed to dull; the white turning an almost wispy grey, like fog at dawn.

In that moment, Dumbledore looked exhausted, ancient.

Then it was gone, and Dumbledore smiled brightly as his magic flared around him. “I see myself with some nice woolen socks.”

Harry couldn’t help it. He coughed, not expecting that answer at all. “Socks, sir?”

“One can never have too many sock, my boy!”

Harry laughed then, the ridiculousness of the statement catching up to him. But internally, he observed Dumbledore carefully, and wondered.

Sumus ambo mendacius.

Harry found himself lying awake the next night, once again staring at the stone as he held it over his head. He couldn’t help but feel like the entire encounter with Dumbledore had been strange. Something about how he’d reacted had seemed too calm, too composed. Too staged.

Like he had almost expected Harry to be there.

The thought gave him pause.

A few pieces started to fall into place. Dumbledore had hinted that there was an exciting, dangerous room in the third floor, almost taunting students into going and looking for it. He’d given Harry his father’s invisibility cloak over Winter Break, a cloak clearly made to explore and walk around undetected. Harry had been allowed to go and explore with the mirror a few times before Dumbledore had intercepted him, even though surely he’d placed some manner of warning spells in case anyone went into that room. It all just seemed too...perfect of a situation to attribute to coincidence.

Why Dumbledore wanted him to find the mirror, Harry had no idea. It might be because he wanted to know what Harry saw in the mirror; to see if maybe he would keep coming back, entranced like Draco had said happened to some people. Maybe he’d expected Harry to find the stone. Maybe he was just waiting now, to see what Harry would do with it?

No, there was no way Dumbledore knew Harry had the stone, or he surely would have taken it from him by now. Letting him have such a powerful object, knowing that it was highly coveted and could result in Harry coming to great harm, was surely something that Dumbledore had not intended. Unless Harry had deeply misunderstood Dumbledore’s character, and he didn’t think he had, not to such an extreme extent.

Rather, Harry was starting to think that Dumbledore might simply be a little daft when it came to the safety of his students. Honestly speaking, Harry had a hard time believing that Dumbledore had made the ‘danger’ announcement with the express intention of luring some adventurous kids to go

to the mirror. It was too...stupid of a tactic. Too many things that could go wrong. And as for the cloak, he probably *had* just been keeping it for his father, and felt like Christmas was a great time for a gift. Really, it was either Dumbledore was an evil mastermind whose plans involved mildly inconveniencing schoolchildren...or he was just a slightly senile old Headmaster. Powerful, of course, but maybe just easily distracted. In fact, he was fairly sure Dumbledore hadn't even realized the stone was no longer in the mirror, never mind who's possession it was in. Which meant he either hadn't thought to check whether the mirror still had the stone, perhaps convinced it was secure...or he didn't know the stone existed at all.

It was certainly a possibility, but Harry doubted that was the case. Dumbledore may be old and little strange, but Harry was not about to underestimate one of the most famously powerful wizards in the world to that extent. There was obviously a reason that this mirror was being stored in the school, and the obvious reason was that it was meant to protect the stone inside the mirror. Presumably no one but the old Headmaster knew the stone was hidden inside it, so having the mirror as a decoy was actually a pretty clever plan. If anyone ventured into the room by accident, like Harry had, or just because they were being adventurous, they would find the *Mirror of Erised*, be shocked by their own heart's desire, and think that that was all that was being hidden. Harry had definitely fallen for the ploy, and wouldn't have even suspected that there was another layer to the situation if the stone had not fallen into his lap, literally.

Which brought him back to the present dilemma of what he was going to do with the stone. He didn't want to keep it, that was for sure. He'd considered giving it to someone else, like the Malfoy family, but Harry didn't think that was wise, either. Perhaps he was being paranoid, but he didn't want to risk a family like the Malfoys being targeted for having the stone, either by thieves, or assassins, or even by the Ministry, who would claim they were Dark and therefore trying to use the stone for evil purposes. Dumbledore almost certainly knew the stone was stored in the mirror, had likely put it there himself, and even though he didn't currently know it had been taken, he would surely figure it out at some point. And Harry didn't even want to think of what measures he'd take to get it back.

He'd considered just putting the stone back in the mirror and pretending he'd never found it in the first place, but to be honest he had no idea how he'd do that. If it was a spell set up by Dumbledore, which was beginning to seem more and more likely, then Harry had no clue as to how he could re-cast it, or reverse it, or anything. Even just leaving the stone on the floor in front of the mirror would be problematic, since Dumbledore knew Harry knew about the room, and would surely be suspicious of his motives. Not to mention that another student might stumble into the room and find the stone before Dumbledore, which would be the worst possible outcome.

No, it was better that Harry just gave it back to Dumbledore directly as soon as possible.

After all, if he'd been expecting Harry to come to the mirror from the start, then Harry might as well follow the script to the end. He didn't really think he had any better options at this point.

“Sir?”

“Come in, Harry, my boy! Take a seat. What is it you want to talk about?”

Harry shuffled in quietly, part of him still debating whether he should have gone to Snape instead. But, to be honest, as with Quirrell, he wanted to be done with the whole issue as quickly as

possible, and he assumed that if he gave the stone to Snape, he would end up giving it to Dumbledore anyways. At least this way, Dumbledore would have no reason to doubt that he was hiding anything. Snape didn't even know Harry had seen the mirror, not that Harry was aware of, anyways, and Harry didn't really want to go through the whole 'lying about my parents' thing with Snape.

Especially not with Snape, who had not only known his parents, but clearly had strong personal opinions about them. Harry wanted to trust Snape enough to tell him the truth about his reflection in the mirror, but...he wasn't quite there yet. He hadn't even told him about his magic, he wasn't even close to being there yet.

He took a seat in the chair in front of Dumbledore's desk, trying internally to stay relaxed. He looked up and saw Fawkes, Dumbledore's phoenix, preening himself. The phoenix's magic lay almost flat against his body, a dark red, but pulsed with a density that had Harry frowning slightly. It seemed eerily similar to the stone, but in a less...rigid way? It could be because of their ability to be reborn, Harry supposed. He would have to look into it later.

Fawkes, meanwhile, didn't pay him much attention, just a small glance before he was back to his feathers. Harry envied a bit his calm countenance. He turned back to Dumbledore, strengthening his resolve.

"Sir, I ...I wasn't entirely truthful that last time we met...in front of the mirror." Harry decided to go for a soft, chastised kind of appearance. He wasn't even entirely sure that Dumbledore knew the stone existed, so he had to tread carefully.

He watched with interest as Dumbledore's expression shuttered, then cleared. A little worrisome. "Not entirely truthful? In what way?"

Harry took a deep breath. He was doing the right thing here, surely Dumbledore wouldn't be angry with him. Not too angry, hopefully.

"I actually found the mirror earlier this month." Dumbledore looked a little surprised, but not much else. "I went to it two times before I met you there, sir. The first time it was entirely accidental, as I said, but the second time I was just so curious...I just wanted to see if it was real? Not something I'd dreamt up?"

Dumbledore nodded, understanding.

Harry continued. "And the second time I went, I...got something from the mirror."

The change was instantaneous. Dumbledore's magic, which had been swirling slowly around him, went suddenly, threateningly still. It seemed to almost freeze the air around him, a bone-chilling, intensely ominous threat.

Harry felt his heart stutter in fear. He was suddenly fully, wholly aware that if he wanted to, Dumbledore could kill him in an instant, and Harry would be completely powerless to stop him. He'd known it before, of course, in the same way that he'd known a tiger in a zoo could kill him, but he hadn't previously been quite so *viscerally* aware of that fact.

At least now Harry knew for sure that Dumbledore knew about the stone.

Dumbledore gave him a small smile. It did not reassure Harry. "Something? What was it, my boy?"

Harry had to repress a shudder. He slowly reached into his pocket, unwilling to make any sudden moves. "I found this stone." He drew it out, lifting it in his hands as he held it out to Dumbledore,

as non-threateningly as possible. Dumbledore stared at it for a moment before turning his gaze back onto Harry.

“Do you know what this stone is, Mr. Potter?”

So he was Mr. Potter, now. Harry swallowed. “Yes, sir. At least, I think so.”

“What is it?”

“The Philosopher’s Stone, sir.”

Dumbledore peered at him calculatingly. “And do you know what this stone does?” He still did not take the stone from Harry’s hands.

Harry felt clearly that he was being tested. He didn’t like it; he had hoped this whole situation would be resolved quickly, that he’d just hand it over, and have it all be done with. He wasn’t sure why Dumbledore was so determined to make sure Harry knew what he was giving up. Surely it was better to be subtle about it? Even if Harry hadn’t realized its value before, he would have been suspicious of it by now.

“Yes, sir. It can turn any metal into gold, and it can make an elixir that makes its drinker immortal.”

Dumbledore was silent. Harry felt himself itch, in the back of his neck. Did Dumbledore not want the stone? It made sense, Harry didn’t want it either, but surely the Headmaster would take responsibility for this? Harry had found it in his school, after all.

Then, Dumbledore sighed, finally reaching out and picking up the stone from Harry’s hands. Harry could feel his magic complaining, feeling the pull from the stone as it was being taken away, but he ignored the feeling. Now that he knew where it was coming from, his curiosity was sated, and he no longer felt the overwhelming urge to figure out what the pull was, even if he didn’t quite understand why.

“Why are you giving this to me, my boy?”

Harry’s eyebrows scrunched together. “You are considered one of the most powerful wizards alive right now, so if anyone in this castle can keep the stone safe, it would be you.”

“You flatter me.” He didn’t sound particularly flattered, in Harry’s opinion. “But I suppose I meant, why aren’t you keeping the stone for yourself?”

Harry glanced at the stone, feeling its heavy magic reaching out to his own. He shivered. “It’s too powerful. I think it’s too dangerous for someone like me to have. I can’t possibly protect myself if someone wanted to hurt me for it. Not to mention what might happen to the stone if someone else took it. Some people would do terrible things to become immortal, and terrible wars have been fought over much less.”

Dumbledore’s expression turned into one of incredulity. Then, he suddenly started laughing softly. Harry couldn’t figure out what was funny about what he’d said. After a few moments, he stopped, but his magic had finally relaxed around him, so Harry didn’t mind the laughter.

“You are quite wise, Harry. More than many people I’ve met.” Dumbledore said, turning the stone in his hand; then, so quietly that Harry wasn’t sure if he was meant to hear it, “Perhaps even more than me.”

Harry didn't know how to respond. He felt like what he'd said was logical, obvious even. A stone that made you immortal and as rich as you could possibly want? Not to mention the amount of influence having something like this would bring you. Thousands, hundreds of thousands even, had died over less. Harry had no illusions over the kinds of things people would do to get this stone from him. And Harry, as much as he was proud of his abilities, was highly aware of his own limitations, and knew he would be an easy target if anyone actively decided they wanted him dead. What good was an elixir that made him immortal if he wasn't alive to enjoy it?

After a moment of silence, Dumbledore gave a small sigh. "Thank you for telling me the truth, my boy. I will make sure that this stone is well protected." He put the stone into his robes before then turning back to Harry with curiosity. Harry didn't particularly like that look, and he'd been hoping to get out of here without too many questions being asked, but he recognized that was a bit too optimistic.

"Speaking of which, how *did* you manage to acquire this stone? The defensive measures I put in place for it were quite...specific."

Harry blinked. He actually had no idea how he'd gotten the stone. He'd really just been rambling to himself, a little to Henry, and then the stone had just...appeared. The only clue he had as to what had happened was that he wanted to know how the mirror worked. But how to explain that he'd been trying to recreate the mirror...?

Actually, telling the truth might not be too bad. Well, most of the truth. Some parts of the truth. An extremely edited, very carefully curated version of the truth. A political propaganda's version of the truth.

"I'm not really sure, to be honest. I...was trying to figure out what the mirror was?"

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow. "Go on."

"I had been standing in front of the mirror, looking at myself...and my parents....and just, rambling about ideas? I'm sorry, sir, I really don't know."

"What were you saying specifically?"

Harry ran a hand through his hair. "Just how I wanted to know what the mirror did. If it had any secrets or..." It hit him then. "Oh! I said something like 'show me your secret'. Is that what did it?"

Honestly, it seemed like too obvious an answer to the riddle, but maybe that was the point. Hide it in plain sight, make it seem so stupid that no one will ever try it? But Harry could tell he was still missing something.

Dumbledore considered him for a moment. "Perhaps. And what did you intend to do once you had the secret of the mirror?"

Harry shook his head. "Nothing. I was just curious."

"So it seems," Dumbledore replied thoughtfully, bringing his hands together. "I'm truly quite impressed." He gazed at Harry thoughtfully before seemingly coming to a decision. "The spell I put in the mirror was intended to only allow those who wanted the stone, but had no intentions of using it, to acquire it. Everyone else would only see themselves with piles of gold, or something similar."

Harry's face twisted in confusion. "Why not just make it impossible to get at all? Why allow anyone to have even an opportunity of acquiring it?"

Dumbledore looked pleased by his question. “That might be logical in other situations, but the spell I used for hiding the stone is a bit more complex, but much better, than other alternatives. It is much stronger when it is given a proper way to be accessed, rather than just sealing everyone out completely.” Dumbledore replied.

Harry perked up. “How so, sir? If I may ask? This sounds really interesting.”

Dumbledore chuckled. “I’m glad you think so. Well, think of the spell like a balloon being filled with water. If we make it so that the balloon has no holes at all, then eventually it will pop from the pressure, if we keep adding water. However, if we add a hole to it, then no matter how much water we add, it won’t pop because there is an escape for the water if the pressure gets too high.”

Harry considered the explanation. “The water would be someone trying to break the spell through brute force? Magically?”

Dumbledore nodded. “Indeed. Placing strong magical pressure on a spell is a common way to break it, especially spells that are used to hide objects. Allow me to use another analogy; consider a piece of cloth. If you make sure to tightly string it up from all sides, like a drum, it would be extremely easy to tear through it with any kind of blunt object; in a way, the supports actually make the cloth more fragile. On the other hand, if you only attach it from one side, then punching the cloth is entirely ineffective, and it will simply go back to its place once the hand is retracted. In this situation, the spell is the cloth itself; as long as the fabric does not tear, the spell will hold, and tightening it to its frame is not only unnecessarily, but counter-productive. A drum-like structure is ideal in defensive spells, that must function like armor, but in spells that focus on twisting space and perception it is actually rather inappropriate.”

Harry found himself paying close attention to everything Dumbledore was saying. It was some of the most interesting information he’d heard on how more complex spells were designed, both for their specific purpose as well as their most obvious counters. He wanted to take notes, but he hadn’t brought any parchment or quills with him. He hadn’t thought they would be necessary, and he was deeply regretting it now.

“Sir, thank you so much for explaining all this to me.” Harry said, genuinely grateful. Dumbledore gave him a kind, soft smile.

“Of course, my boy. It is the least I can do after you have shown such strength of character.”

Harry shook his head, feeling embarrassed by praise which he didn’t feel like he deserved. He didn’t feel it showed ‘strength of character’ to not want to get killed. Dumbledore seemed to understand his reluctance and instead gestured towards him. “If you have any other questions, feel free to seek me out. If I am not busy, I would not mind talking more with you, my boy.” He paused. “And, of course, if you happen to run into any other interesting...situations, I am always more than happy to help.”

Harry nodded, smiling. He would absolutely take advantage of that offer. From what everyone said, Dumbledore was one of the most knowledgeable, most powerful wizards alive. Being given permission to use him as a resource was certainly not something Harry was going to turn down. “Yes, sir. Thank you, sir!”

“No need to thank me so much, Harry. Even though I am now Headmaster, I used to be a Professor, and all I’ve ever really wanted to do is help teach young wizards and spread knowledge. Having young pupils who like learning as much as you do is a joy.”

Harry wanted to thank him again, but felt it would just lead into a loop, so instead he bowed his

head slightly. “I will do that, sir. If that is all, would it be alright for me to leave now?” He’d already been here for almost an hour, and although he had plenty of things he’d like to talk to Dumbledore about, he was still feeling a bit too high-strung over the stone, and everything that he’d learned so far. Dumbledore nodded.

“Of course, I’ve kept you long enough.”

Harry stood, taking another look at Fawkes, who hadn’t really reacted throughout the entire conversation. He seemed to be almost done preening, most of his feathers now lined cleanly. His magic still gave off a strange heaviness.

“Goodnight, sir,” Harry said, leaving the office.

“Goodnight, my boy.”

Dumbledore gently stroked his beard, peering at the stone he now held. From his perch, Fawkes peered at it curiously, every now and then leaning down to get a closer look.

He’d known Harry was lying when they’d met in front of the mirror. The way the boy’s expression had shifted when he’d come into the room and looked at his reflection, into what appeared to be annoyance, and even a bit of disgust, was the single most interesting and strange reaction he’d ever seen, or even heard of, to someone looking into the infamous Mirror of Erised.

Happiness, adoration, relief? To be expected. Sadness, longing? Almost as common as happiness, another side to the same coin, in many ways. Anger? Sometimes, maybe when the person saw something they knew they couldn’t have and felt mocked. Even frustration, perhaps if they were close to achieving their goals, but not quite there yet.

But that dismissive annoyance, that faint *disgust*? Like he considered the reflection a bug he’d accidentally stepped on, a fly in his hair?

That, never.

So when Harry had turned to the mirror with a longing look, and claimed he saw his parents, Dumbledore had known two things.

One, that Harry did not want him to know what he was seeing in the mirror, because it certainly was not his parents. No matter how Harry might think he felt about his deceased mother and father, if they were his heart’s deepest desire, he would not be able to hide from the mirror. Even if he felt resentful, or abandoned, the predominant emotions would still in the end be longing, sadness. Not disgust.

And two, Harry knew what the mirror was, because he knew that not only was what he saw not something that he wanted Dumbledore to know about, but also that saying that he saw his parents was something Dumbledore would approve of.

Part of Dumbledore was incredibly concerned about the whole ordeal. Harry Potter was turning out to be a secretive and manipulative young boy, so different from what Lily and James had been and from what Dumbledore had expected, had hoped for. A part of him worried about the similarities he could see between Harry and another Slytherin child from many years ago, a child who had

turned out to be so much more terrible than he could have imagined, and wondered if they would turn out to walk similar paths.

However, he couldn't bring himself to believe that.

For all that Dumbledore could imagine that Harry saw incriminating things in the mirror and therefore wanted to hide them, it still didn't answer the question of his reaction to it. If Harry had seen something like 'power' or 'riches', or even 'Harry as an Immortal God-King', his expression would surely have been at the very least some version of happy; greedy, perhaps, wishful and desirous of what the mirror showed. Not to mention, Harry had willingly given up immortality and power both with the stone, and although Dumbledore knew he had a lot of money from his inheritance, greedy people would never give up such an easy opportunity to monumentally increase their wealth.

If anything, he seemed much more interested in the explanation of the spell that Dumbledore had given him than any other part of their conversation. His eyes had shone when Dumbledore had agreed to go more in depth, and especially so when he'd explained why the spell he'd used was structured the way it was. The entire explanation had been entirely theoretical, and Harry hadn't even asked about any details, so it really didn't seem like Harry was looking for a way around the spell, but rather just wanted to know how it worked. It wasn't really the kind of interest that power-hungry people tended to show, at least in Dumbledore's experience. Pure theory seemed like a waste of time to them, while it clearly was everything but to Harry.

In contrast, whatever it was Harry saw in the mirror, he seemed he felt it was beneath him, and that was honestly simply shocking to Dumbledore. He'd never seen the mirror be wrong before, not truly; there was something about the image that made even those deep in denial accept what they saw, even if to others they would never admit it. But Harry hadn't been hiding any reluctance, or denying what he saw. He simply seemed...mildly repulsed.

The more important part of why he couldn't find it in himself to be truly worried about what Harry was hiding was simply that he'd given Dumbledore the stone, even knowing exactly what it was. Dumbledore could count on one hand the number of people who would have done that - of which the young child from many years ago was absolutely not one of them - and certainly none of them would give it over so easily and without wanting anything in return. It made part of him wonder if Harry simply hadn't realized the depth of what the stone meant; but then again, it was precisely because he *did* understand how powerful the stone was that Harry had given it to him in the first place. Harry realized that he could not protect the stone from others, if anyone ever found out he had it, and rather than risk it falling into the hands of those who would use it for evil, or getting killed for it, he had decided to come to Dumbledore for help, even knowing that there might be other consequences.

Dumbledore felt his worries dissipate. He'd keep watch over Harry, in any case, but he had hope for him. He might be manipulative and secretive, but he was a young, smart boy, and deserved to keep some secrets if he wanted to. So far, he'd never tried to hurt anyone, and in fact had performed admirably when presented with extremely difficult situations, both with Quirrell and with the stone. It wouldn't be fair for Dumbledore to assume the worst of him just because he didn't want to admit to his deepest desires to his Headmaster, who he'd talked to a grand total of... 3 times? Yes, Harry was just a child, and Dumbledore would do well to keep that in mind. Perhaps Harry was simply embarrassed of what he saw in the mirror, and didn't wish to have anyone know such personal details about him, much less a teacher. It was perfectly normal behaviour.

It wasn't like Dumbledore didn't have his own secrets, after all.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone, please stay safe with the virus going around right now! Let your inner introvert thrive :D

I'm doing fine, no need to worry about me, love you all!

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Thank you all so much for all your kind words! You are so wonderful, and I'm glad you are still enjoying this story with me.

Here's another chapter! Not all updates will be this fast, unfortunately, but I'll try my best to not take as long as last time again!

Please let me know what you think, comments and kudos are always welcome!

Thank you for reading <3

Ratio

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Come on, Harry, we’re going to be late!”

“I’m coming, give me a moment.”

“What takes you so long?” Draco groused, peering into the bathroom. Upon catching sight of Harry, his face contorted. He let out a snort, but then his composure slipped and he was bent over in full-on laughter. Harry pouted at him.

“It’s not my fault!”

“It looks even *worse* than usual! I didn’t know it was possible!” Draco managed through his peals of laughter, tears forming at his eyes. “What did you even do?!”

Harry took in his red face in the mirror, thoroughly regretting trying to get his hair to behave for once. He really had done a terrible job, he admitted; the gel he’d borrowed from Draco was doing nothing for keeping it in place, and instead had formed hard peaks that looked like horns coming from all over his head. He looked like a cartoon character, or at least someone doing a poor job of imitating one.

“I just...it gets so messy and tangled when we have Flying Lessons, I just thought some gel would help?”

He’d tried once, when he was seven, to use his magic to make his hair lay down properly on his head. Thankfully it had all grown back overnight, and he hadn’t tried again since.

“What are you guys being so loud for? We have to get to class.” Blaise’s voice came from the entrance to their room.

“Nothing!” Harry yelped. He was embarrassed enough with Draco seeing this mess, he didn’t need the rest of the boys knowing too. Especially not Blaise, who looked like a model even on his worst days. Harry didn’t even think he was *trying*.

Draco finally managed to get his laughter under control. “Give us a minute, Blaise, we’ll be right out.”

“Alright, I’ll be in the Common Room,” he said, still sounding curious, but then left.

Harry let out a defeated sigh. “I’ll just take it out. It was stupid to try something like this.”

Draco gave him a considering look, placing a hand under his chin. “Maybe one of the girls has something that might help? I know Pansy takes care of her hair a lot, I’ve heard Daphne complain about how long she takes in the shower.”

“She has nice hair,” Harry murmured, a little jealously, leaning over the sink.

“What are you doing?”

Harry turned to him, confused. “Rinsing out my hair? I’m not going to take a shower just to get this off.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “We have spells for that, you know? This brand is specifically made to be removable with a spell; it lasts all day otherwise.”

“Well, I can’t really cast spells very well, now can I?” Harry snapped.

Draco went silent, and Harry immediately felt bad for taking out his annoyance on the other boy. It wasn’t Draco’s fault that Harry was stuck with *two* wands he couldn’t use. It was a sick joke, as far as he was concerned, but that didn’t excuse his outburst.

He wouldn’t have minded in general, would have preferred to use his own magic in any given situation, but the fact that he had to use spells in classes meant that he was constantly having to pretend to be so weak and powerless that he couldn’t even grasp the spells at all, even when everyone around him could figure it out within days. It was that or risk putting everyone in his classes in danger, and Harry wasn’t *that* hung up on his own pride. Harry hadn’t really ever considered himself an overly proud person, or someone that cared too much about others’ opinions, but he *was* sensitive to other people thinking he was incapable, *incompetent*, and this idiotic situation was making everyone think exactly that.

His one saving grace was that, in everything that did not require a wand, he was one of the best students in his year. Potions, Herbology, Astronomy and History of Magic were where he shone, and even in the other classes, his essays were always well regarded and he could always answer questions the teachers asked.

So at least people didn’t think he was stupid, which was what would have bothered Harry the most, but he knew that a good group of them suspected he might be a Squib.

Harry had nothing against Squibs, wouldn’t have overly minded being one if that was his lot in life, but he *wasn’t* and so the other students were just *wrong* and that was what bothered him. He couldn’t even prove it to them without exposing all of his magic, and Harry wasn’t willing to do that.

Thankfully, he had Draco and Snape who were aware that his issue had little to do with his innate magical power, so if he ever needed to vent they provided him some comfort, even though neither of them even quite knew the true extent of his power. Their understanding was enough most of the time, but the general annoyance was still there.

“Sorry, Draco, I’m just....”

Draco sniffed slightly. “No, it’s my fault, I should be more aware. If I were in your position I would be upset too.”

Harry felt warmth blossom through him. “Still, I’m sorry. You’ve been really wonderful about all this, I think I would have lost my mind without having you to talk to about it.”

Draco grimaced, his cheeks going a little pink. “Well, someone has to defend you when those stupid Gryffindors make up rumors. Anyways, let me help you with that. I’ll be your wand for now.”

“Thank you, Draco dearest,” Harry replied sweetly, with only a tiny amount of laughter behind it. “You always know what to say.”

“Don’t start with that, Potter, one Blaise is enough,” Draco said, his tone caught between irritable and amused, as he took out his wand with a small flourish. “Flattery will get you nowhere with me.”

Harry almost scoffed at him, but he did still want Draco's help so antagonizing him too much was ill-advised. Still, he couldn't just let an outrageous lie like that stand. "That's *definitely* not true."

"Do you want my help of not?" Draco asked with a hint of warning that Harry picked up on immediately. He smiled innocently at the blond, fluttering his eyelashes for the added effect.

"Yes, please."

It was after dinner, a time when most students were either studying or chatting with each other, and mostly just enjoying having some time away from the classroom. Meanwhile, Harry had been sitting in his usual couch, reading a book on the rise of Voldemort and the Wizarding War to finally get a decent grasp on a topic which he felt he needed to know more about as quickly as possible. It was very hard to find a book that was even mildly objective on the subject in the Hogwarts Library, seeing as it covered a lot of Dark -- and 'dark' -- topics, but he'd gotten Draco to send for one from his own personal library, which was significantly more inclusive when it came to those topics.

He'd learned a good amount so far, about what the Dark Lord Voldemort had stood for at the beginning, as well as a much greater understanding of just how much the man's insanity had changed him.

Voldemort's initial campaign had been centered mostly on giving Dark wizards equal rights to Light wizards when it came to practicing their branches of magic, as well as solidifying the foundation of ancient wizarding tradition and culture. He also believed in a stronger separation from Muggles, as he held that they were extremely dangerous and capable of widespread destruction.

He had wanted to establish a solid education as to what exactly Dark Magic was, as well as general information on what differentiated Light and Dark magic, and how using one type of magic over the other affected the user's magic and development. It had nothing to do with trying to push Dark magic as superior, as Harry had assumed initially; Voldemort had pretty much only wanted wizards to be educated on Magic as a whole, of which Dark magic was a part. He also included sections on magical creatures, their own alignments, and how to interact with those that one might be able to find more commonly. It was all very instructional, and sounded exactly like the kind of thing Harry would have wanted to have taught at Hogwarts. He knew there was a Care of Magical Creatures at Hogwarts, but from what he'd heard it was more of an 'Extremely Dangerous Petting Zoo' kind of class, rather than one that taught anything useful on magical creatures as a whole.

In fact, he had realized that Defence was essentially a bastardization of the class Voldemort had wanted to instate. A class that taught about Dark magic and magical creatures, but only spoke of them like they were evil, a perversion of magic rather than a perfectly natural part of it, and taught one not how to interact with creatures, but simply how to attack or incapacitate them. It made him angry the more he thought about it, how it was a mockery of the equality the Dark Lord had tried to implement. Knowing how much the Ministry hated Dark magic, maybe that was exactly what it was.

His position on tradition and customs was similar to on Dark Magic, except for the part that was mostly aimed at Muggleborns. He had wanted to try and incorporate them further into the Wizarding world, rather than treating them like intruders and giving them no help whatsoever.

Muggleborns often only found out they were Wizards when they reached the age of 11, unless they performed excessive feats of magic before then. Even so, their parents often had no idea what was going on, and were expected to either accept that magic was real, just like that, or be Obliviated and believe that their child was going away to some Muggle private school all year round. It was a pretty poor system, all things considered.

Furthermore, once they were in Hogwarts, Muggleborns were expected to adapt to a society that was wholly unfamiliar to them, with no guides on customs or all the things that wizarding children took for granted. They were outcasts, branded as foreign and different through no fault of their own, with no way to integrate because there was no source of information available unless they specifically went to a bookstore to pick up a book on the subject like Harry had done. But what normal child could be, should be expected to think of that? At the very least, the school should be providing some material, like a specialized 'So you're a Muggleborn!' brochure, but even that was missing. The Dark Lord had wanted to instate a class that would teach them about common Wizarding customs and traditions, as well as just general everyday knowledge of the Wizarding World. Further instruction would have been given, if the student wanted to take the class further, for more in-depth studies on wizarding tradition and history; like History of Magic, but focused only on Wizarding kind, and hopefully significantly less boring.

Even the whole 'separation from Muggles' idea sounded perfectly reasonable to Harry. He was well aware of what bombs were and what exactly they were capable of, and knew the entire wizarding population of Britain would be in grave danger if anyone found out wizards existed and decided to exterminate them. However, from what he had seen, and what he'd heard from about 'Muggle Studies', most wizards were extremely ignorant when it came to Muggle technology, and seemed to believe that Muggles were not only powerless, but helpless as well. Which was laughable, since Harry had no doubts that, in an actual war, wizarding kind would lose almost comically quickly. A shield would only stop so many bullets, never mind the aforementioned bomb.

All in all, it meant that he was even more saddened and frustrated by the knowledge that Voldemort had messed everything up by going insane. He'd been building a solid following by that point, filled with plenty of strong, intelligent Dark wizards who only wanted what was best for their society and their families. But instead they were forced to be Dark supremacists, who went after Muggles and Muggleborns indiscriminately, and had inadvertently almost revealed the entirety of Wizarding Britain to them. So really, Harry could see how even the Slytherins were happy he'd been stopped, even if it meant that now all Dark wizards were discriminated against and considered evil incarnate; that Dark magic was treated as a joke, a mindless beast to be either beaten or ignored as much as possible.

He'd make it up to them. He wasn't sure how, yet, but he would find a way. Harry had money, power, and the dubious honor of being the Vanquisher of the Dark Lord, which meant Light Wizards were more predisposed to listen to him. If anyone was in a position to help, it was him. It would be difficult, of course, but he'd never shied away from a challenge he thought he could handle, and he wasn't about to start now, when the only friends he'd ever made were suffering because of it.

Speaking of whom, he was accompanied in the Common Room by Pansy and Draco, who were playing chess by the fireplace, and Blaise, who was reading.

The portrait to the Common Room suddenly swung open, and in limped Theodore Nott, clutching at his stomach in pain. Pansy was immediately on her feet, rushing over.

"Theo, what's wrong? What happened?"

“I got jumped,” he said, coughing. It looked like the action caused him even more pain, and Harry wondered if one of his ribs was broken. “Smith, Weasley, and two other guys, I don’t know who they were...they pulled me into a classroom and started beating me up.” He closed his eyes, his voice going quiet. “I couldn’t even defend myself, I just closed my eyes and tried to protect my face.”

For a moment, Pansy’s face went stone cold with fury. Then, she pasted on a soft smile, and wrapped a supporting hand around his shoulders. “There, there, Theo, you’re safe now. Tell me everything that happened.”

Harry watched him with a frown for a moment before turning to Draco.

“I never thought Weasley would just gang up on someone like that, what’s his problem?”

Draco’s lip twisted with scorn. “It’s probably Smith who’s been filling his head with stupid ideas. That guy is a right arsehole. The Weasleys may be blood-traitors but they’ve never really messed with us.”

Harry looked at him with a pained expression. “Draco, please.”

He understood Draco’s frustration with the Weasleys, he really did. A powerful, ancient pureblood family, turning their back on centuries of tradition, abandoning their roots because they wanted to fit in with Muggleborns, wanted them to like them, was rankling on the best days. And he was well aware that Draco’s father and the Weasley patriarch had a bit of a feud going on - Draco had filled him in on some of the people his father fought most often with at the Ministry, Arthur Weasley being one of them - but calling them names and ridiculing their ideals was not the way to convince anyone of anything.

Draco pressed his lips together, clearly upset, but didn’t argue. Harry sighed. It was a complex process, he knew, coming to terms with the ways you were also being prejudiced and hateful, but it was ultimately for the best. If the Light side had to respect the Dark, then the Dark had to respect the Light as well, even if they weren’t in direct agreement. Anything else would be hypocritical, and besides, Harry wanted to have all magic accepted as a whole.

But there was a huge difference between ideological disagreements, and actually going after someone because of who their family was, like what had just happened to Nott. No one was going to take that laying down, and Harry would certainly not have supported it if they had.

No one dared attack most of the younger Slytherins, especially not Draco or Pansy, even though a lot of their parents had been Death Eaters. This was simply because most of them came from powerful, influential bloodlines, and attacking their heirs would not lead to anything good for their own families. Draco especially loved using ‘My father will hear about this!’ as a way to cow any older students who would antagonize him, and it had become a bit of a running joke between his friends.

Blaise’s stance wasn’t particularly well known, since his mother hadn’t participated in the war openly, but Harry had learned that he, Draco and Pansy had been close friends since they were young, so it was not surprising that he also secretly supported the Dark. However, his lack of openness on the subject and his careful maintenance of his public image meant that the other Houses generally had good impressions of him. Apart from that, half the school had a crush on Blaise; picking on him would net you at least a few dozen enemies almost instantly.

Harry had initially faced some derision simply for the fact that he had been sorted into Slytherin, when everyone had expected him to go to Gryffindor. However, that had died out pretty quickly

when it became clear that Harry wouldn't really respond to any taunting or insults, and if anyone tried anything further they would face the wrath of Draco and, more subtly, Snape. Besides, nobody really wanted to be known as the person who bullied the Boy-Who-Lived, Slytherin or not.

In contrast, Nott came from a small, poor pureblood Dark family, with little to no connections and negligible influence. He was friendly enough with the other Slytherins, but outside his own House there was nothing stopping other students from bullying him, mostly verbally but every once in a while with minor hexes, or once even with putting the wrong ingredients in his potion when he wasn't looking. He'd never asked for help, because despite his lack of status he was proud and ambitious, and wanted to owe no one anything, and he felt like he could handle the harassment from the other Houses on his own.

But they'd never before hurt him this badly.

"You have to go to the Infirmary."

Nott shivered, going even paler than before. "I'm scared they'll find me," he admitted finally, through another small, painful cough. An admission of that sort was monumental, both from the proud Nott and in front of the entire Slytherin Common Room as, in any other circumstance, Nott's reputation would have been severely damaged by it. But right now, in the face of targeted violence, intra-House politics had been set aside in favor of unifying against a common enemy.

Pansy's smile was razor sharp. "Don't worry about them, they won't bother you ever again. I promise."

Nott gulped as he saw the look in her eyes, and nodded, somewhat gratefully. His pride was smarting, and he would benefit from her interference, but he also knew that Pansy's help was not coming out of the kindness of her heart. He would be in her debt, in the future. Pansy turned to the rest of the Common Room with a commanding look. "Who here is willing to help?" It sounded like she was asking for a favor, but that wasn't exactly the case; she was silently offering her goodwill in return, which was fairly valuable.

"I'll take him to the infirmary," a fifth year who'd been listening jumped up to volunteer, clearly recognizing the chance to enter into one of the most powerful Dark family's good graces. "They won't dare try anything if he's with me."

He hoisted Nott's arm onto his shoulder and they slowly walked out of the Common Room.

"They'll pay for this," Pansy said quietly, tonelessly, watching them go. Draco nodded, his face blank and his eyes cold.

It was well known within Slytherin that the two scariest people in their house were Pansy and Draco. They were not as magically or physically strong as the older years, and they did not know as many spells, but they had a capacity for viciousness, a cruel streak that was only enhanced by their cunning and resourcefulness, and it more than made up the difference. They tended to play it down, for the most part, Pansy happy to appear kind and a little gossipy, Draco happy to appear arrogant and a little lazy. They played the role of innocent children well, especially when in front of teachers, and for the most part no one ever suspected that they were capable of anything worrying.

But there had been one incident with a 4th year Slytherin boy in their first month in Hogwarts that had proven to everyone in their House that Draco and Pansy were *not to be messed with*, at your own peril.

Harry still wondered what exactly they had done to him, but Draco and Pansy were firm in their stance of “*not guilty*” and refused to share any details even with him.

Everyone suspected they were the culprits, because the victim had been harassing them since they’d entered the school, antagonizing them over and over again despite warnings from his friends and even one from Draco himself. He’d tried to gain the upper hand over them, using his age and knowledge of magic to his advantage, clearly thinking that if Draco and Pansy were to start obeying him his influence both within and outside of Hogwarts would greatly increase. But the 4th year had made a terrible mistake in choosing his targets, and they in return had done an admirable job of leaving no evidence when they decided to make their move against him. The only proof anything had even happened was that the boy had disappeared from the castle one day, and still hadn’t returned. The official story was the his parents had decided to move to another country, and so he’d had to transfer, but there were rumors going around that some students had heard screaming coming from a deserted corridor around the same time that the boy had gone missing.

Initially Harry had been sure they were exaggerating, but the more he got to know Draco and Pansy, the more he wasn’t entirely sure. They certainly looked coldly murderous right now, so different from the usual easy-going and childish personalities they displayed on a daily basis.

The teachers were generally pretty useless when it came to protecting Slytherins. Most of them did their best to set their prejudice aside during classes, but when there was any kind of altercation where one side involved a Slytherin student, they were always automatically assumed to be the culprits. The only ones who would actively take their side were Snape and sometimes Slughorn. But in this kind of situation, where it was four against one and there was no evidence for what had happened other than Nott’s account, it would be hard to convince the other teachers to punish the students responsible. Even if Nott were to show them his injuries, it would be a piece of cake for Smith to lie and claim Nott had attacked him first, and he’d merely been protecting himself. As unbelievable as it was to anyone who knew him, Smith was a Hufflepuff, and that made all the teachers immediately assume that he was harmless. It had allowed him to get away with a lot of things, something he was clearly aware and was taking advantage of.

Which meant that avenging Nott and defending their House fell to them. Harry did not doubt Pansy’s threat at all, and wondered what would become of the four boys who had attacked Nott.

As it turned out, for a few days after the incident, nothing really happened. Nott came back to the Slytherin Common room the second night, but even after his safe return, Draco and Pansy didn’t seem any more willing to let what had happened go. The duo could frequently be found scheming near the fireplace, making plans for how they would deal with the culprits. The only information Harry had managed to get out of them was that they’d found out the identities of the other two students; both third years, a Ravenclaw and a Hufflepuff, neither of whom Harry knew much about. They refused to share any other details and everyone left them alone, except for Blaise who sometimes stopped by to give suggestions.

Nearly a week went by with no updates, and Harry was starting to get impatient.

He was laying on the couch in the Common Room, his arms behind his head and his socked feet laying across the armrest and off the end. He was usually much more reserved, given how important your public image was to Slytherins, but it was one of their House ‘free days’, and everyone was lounging around in loose groups as they talked or played games with each other, in a rare and somewhat strange display of general inclusion. It may have seemed like a normal day to Gryffindors or Hufflepuffs, but Slytherin students were mostly purebloods, and so had grown up with strict rules as to how they should behave around other people, no matter the situation or living condition.

But keeping up appearances constantly was stressful and tiring, even for the most uptight of purebloods, so in an effort to keep the social situation within the House from becoming too tense, Slughorn had, back when he was Head of Slytherin, implemented an unofficial policy to around once every three months have a ‘free day’, when students could act less formally with one another and not be judged for it.

Initially Harry hadn’t really participated, feeling out of place and somewhat intimidated by the lack of normal social rules, but he’d eventually found his own way to relax on those days and by now had grown to appreciate them. It was interesting how interactions would change, who talked to who, what they talked about. It gave an enlightening perspective on the very human side of the Dark purebloods, especially the older years, who were usually particularly stand-offish but on these days open and even friendly. But it was also important to keep in mind that all the students liked this state to be the exception rather than the rule. Harry suspected the reason everyone was so open and friendly in these moments was that because, once the day was over, they weren’t expected to still act like that. *What happens in free day stays in free day* was the one main rule, and anyone who expected to be treated differently afterwards was swiftly reminded of why the time was even needed in the first place. Of course, friendships and alliances did sometimes emerge from them, but these were few and far between, and needed to be fully agreed upon by both parties. If the expectation was one-sided, then nothing could happen, and trying to force the issue was severely frowned upon.

Overall, it was important to understand that it was crucial to the whole point of ‘free day’ that it be an isolated event, and everyone eventually learned to appreciate it for what it was.

So far, two Slytherins he didn’t really know had talked to Harry today, both with questions about his alliances and one with curiosity about his friendship with Draco. Harry had been fairly honest, saying he wanted to support Dark families because he felt that what they were going through was both horribly unfair and partly his fault, and that his friendship with Draco was really just a coincidence, but one he valued. The first answer had surprised them both, for obvious reasons; the Boy-Who-Lived, promising to support the Dark side? It was strange just to think of it, and the first student hadn’t really been convinced. The second boy, however, a 4th year student who had been around for the whole debacle with Pansy and Draco, had looked fairly impressed, and even said he would be interested in being Harry’s ally if he was serious about helping his family in the future. He also understood that Harry already had the support of most of the 1st years, many of which came from extremely powerful families, so Harry’s words were not to be taken lightly. He’d left with an offer to talk later, if Harry ever wanted his support, an offer which Harry was happy to take if ever it was needed. He appreciated the gesture, in any case.

But Harry had been left alone for a few hours now, and he had been thinking a lot about the issue with Nott, and Smith, and the general prejudice against Dark wizards.

What bothered him the most was that the situation was so clearly hypocritical. If Smith had just been doing it out of stupidity, it would have been one thing, but Harry suspected he had done it out of some twisted combination of desire for revenge and desire for justice. There was little that annoyed Harry quite like hypocritical righteousness, where people held themselves to be morally above those that surrounded them and then used it as an excuse to hurt them.

On one hand, he could easily imagine that Weasley and the third years were simply stupid enough to have gotten roped in without entirely understanding what they were getting into. It didn’t make sense that they would have been following a first year’s lead, otherwise. But he knew Smith’s character decently well, had seen the boy around enough to know exactly what kind of person he was.

In Harry's opinion, Smith was rotten, through and through. Not only was he a bully, but he was also smart enough to cause real harm, both in the short and long term. Even worse, he was delusional enough to believe that he was in the right for doing it.

Harry knew exactly what Smith had planned with assaulting Nott. Getting a group of students from the other Houses to help him, two of them older, to make it seem like a unified front from the rest of the student body against the Evil Slytherins. If the Slytherins fought back, it would not only be an attack against Smith and the other three, but against all of the other Houses. No Slytherin would want to start a war against all sides if they could help it, and most of the teachers would be inclined to believe the students from their own Houses rather than the lone Slytherin.

It was a clever -if simple- tactic, and it probably would have worked against any other group of students, but Smith had picked his targets poorly. Because the Slytherin first years included Draco and Pansy, not to mention Harry.

Smith would be destroyed, and Harry felt no pity for him.

Draco and Pansy wanted to hurt all of them, but Harry knew that that was just playing into Smith's trap; even if they left no evidence, it would be obvious it was Slytherins who were to blame, and they would all suffer for it. He just didn't know how to bring it up when they were so invested in their own methods of revenge. Their planning had been going on for long enough that even if they weren't telling him anything, he'd managed to overhear enough to have some idea of what they were going to do.

They were being *extremely* thorough, he would give them that. He just didn't think it would be enough, both to keep them safe and as a way to get revenge.

Blaise suddenly appeared in front of him, giving his position on the couch a sly look. "Mind if I join you?"

Harry leaned forward, grabbing at the back of the couch for leverage. "Oh, yeah, sorry, I'll just.."

But before he could move his feet from the armrest, Blaise reached down and grabbed his calves, slipping under them and then setting them back down on his lap, effectively trapping himself with Harry's body.

Harry stared at him from his half-sitting position, mildly stunned at the unexpected action. Behaviour like this was definitely unusual, even for free day, but then again it was Blaise who he was talking about.

Blaise had always enjoyed teasing Harry, but lately he had been upping the ante on the blatant flirting. A hand on his arm here, a smirk there, calling him 'darling' and 'dear' and 'pretty'. It was all a bit disconcerting for Harry; he'd never been flirted with before, and certainly not by someone as attractive as Blaise. He wouldn't say he minded it, exactly, but he just had no idea how to respond.

During the first few months of knowing Blaise, Harry had felt like the other boy just liked messing with him, enjoying getting a rise out of Harry's clear discomfort with compliments and attention, or maybe as a strange kind of power-move that Harry didn't really understand. But as Harry got to know him better, he started to realize that Blaise wasn't actually doing it to bother Harry, or to gain any kind of social advantage, as he'd first assumed. The realization came from the way that the other boy was always so careful in his wording, how he always made sure Harry was not too uncomfortable with his teasing, how he would keep it private or at least within their close circle of trusted friends. Whether it was that Blaise was also getting to know him better, or Harry was just

getting used to it, what had started as almost bullying had somehow turned into a game between them, if one that Harry still had no idea how to win. That being said, he also had no idea what Blaise was getting out of this, what his goals were. He wasn't trying to antagonize Harry, he was just...?

What exactly, Harry had no idea. Because Blaise wasn't interested in actual romance at all, that much he was sure of. The other boy had never shown any interest in dating anyone that Harry had seen, despite the clear interest from other students, so his end-game with all this flirting was a complete mystery to Harry. Despite his confusion, Blaise had never done something that Harry was truly uncomfortable with, so he was fine with playing along despite not really knowing what exactly he was playing along with in the first place.

Blaise gave him a cocky smirk. "What were you thinking about?" he asked, patting his knee with measured little taps. Harry pouted, pulling his leg back, but Blaise grabbed onto the ankle and pulled it back on his lap. "Come on, darling, tell me what's bothering you."

"Just thinking about Nott. What they did really bothers me, especially knowing that it's happening to other students too," he finally said, crossing his arms over his chest. Blaise could win this one. "I know Pansy and Draco want to go all vigilante on them, and usually I would agree, but that's dealing with the symptoms, not the illness itself."

Blaise shrugged. "With terminal illnesses, sometimes all you can do is treat the symptoms."

Harry nudged him with his knee. "Maybe prejudice against the Dark as a whole is terminal, but in this case, there's a very clear tumor we can cut out. We just have to do it carefully so it doesn't metastasize."

Blaise blinked. "Okay, you lost me there."

"If we aren't careful with how we get rid of Smith, the cancer will spread to the rest of the school," Harry explained, swatting at where Blaise's hand had started tapping on his knee again. "Stop that. Right now it's not that bad; what happened to Nott is the worst we've seen so far. But if this happens and we retaliate in the wrong way? The whole school will turn against us."

"They're already against us."

"You don't understand," Harry insisted, pinning Blaise with his gaze. "If we do this wrong, they will turn against us even more. But if we do this *right*, not only will they will turn against Smith instead, but some of them will even start supporting us. Why win the battle when we can win the war?"

Blaise stared at him with wide eyes. Then a predatory smirk spread on his lips. "You have a plan, then?"

Harry gestured over to where Pansy and Draco were huddled. "Only if they let me. I don't want to step on their toes."

Blaise rolled his eyes. "I've seen what they can do. Their plan may be more satisfying short term, but what you're suggesting sounds much better in the long run," he said, glancing over to them. "And besides, I've always wanted to see what you can do."

Harry sighed. "You might finally get your wish."

"Good."

“..except you can’t come with us, I’m afraid.” Harry replied, smirking at Blaise’s put upon expression. “They have four people, and if we show up with four people, they might feel like we’re trying to fight them. I need Smith to think they have the upper hand.”

Blaise let out a long-suffering sigh. “The sacrifices I make for you.”

Harry poked at Blaise’s leg with his foot. “You poor baby,” he reassured mockingly, “I’ll tell you all about it when I get back.”

“You’d better,” Blaise threatened jokingly, before turning sideways. “Draco, Pansy, Harry here might have a suggestion.”

They both turned to him with judging looks. Harry raised his hands in surrender.

“I know you two have been planning Smith’s demise for a good while now--”

“Not so loudly, Potter, you’ll get us in trouble.”

“--but what about if, instead of *you* doing the killing--

“Merlin, Potter. Are you even listening to me?”

“--we let the whole school be the executioner?”

Draco and Pansy stared at him with wide eyes.

Blaise poked his thigh. “That was very dramatic. Excellent theatrics.”

“Thank you, I’ve been practicing.”

“What do you mean, exactly?” Draco asked, looking doubtful.

“I mean that, if I can frame things in the right way, the entire school will condemn what Smith did. Knowing his personality, he will dig his own grave without any of us needing to get our hands dirty. And what’s more, I think I can use him to convince the other students to support us more widely.”

Draco, the more political of the two, instantly understood what he meant, but Pansy still looked skeptical.

“So you’re just going to let the other students decide if they should be punished?” she asked, clearly annoyed at the idea. “We already know they won’t do anything! Why are we so wrong for wanting to teach that git a lesson?”

“It’s not about right or wrong, it’s about getting the result we want,” Harry said, shaking his head. “Pansy, I know you like to be...direct. But if we attack them directly, we’ll just reinforce their beliefs that we’re evil, and that we deserve what they’re doing to us.”

“And we’re just supposed to let them get away with it?” Pansy said, scowling.

Harry rolled his eyes. “I never said that.” A small grin formed on his face. “There are just much more efficient, much more painful ways of exacting revenge than just hurting someone physically.”

“Spoken like a true Savior,” Blaise nodded approvingly, patting his shin. “My hero.”

Harry kicked him. Gently. “Just let me do the talking.”

Harry watched as the four boys entered the room quietly and quickly closed the door behind them, shuffling about awkwardly as they took in the meeting place, a rarely used classroom in the fifth floor. Smith quickly stepped forward with a scowl, making his position as leader clear, before his expression twisted as he realized Pansy and Draco weren’t the only people waiting for them in the room. Harry wondered what Pansy had said to them to bring them all here; he didn’t even know how she’d figured out who the other two students involved were, but she’d said she would cover this part, and she had delivered. Harry had no complaints.

“Potter? Why are *you* here?”

“Because I think I’m the only person in this school who cares about due process and the Magna Carta,” Harry said drily.

Smith’s face scrunched in confusion. “The what?”

“Never mind. I wanted to ask why you attacked Theodore Nott. A first year who was just going to the Library to check out a book. Alone, I might add. Well, he was alone. You had three other boys with you,” he said, throwing a pointed look at the other culprits. “As far as we know, he didn’t do anything to deserve that. But maybe you disagree?”

Smith scoffed. “My family was attacked by You-Know-Who in the war. I’m only repaying the favor.”

Harry had to suppress a sigh. He’d suspected something similar to be the motive, but to have the other boy just state it outwards like that, like it justified everything, was so much more aggravating than he’d thought it would be. He could already feel a headache incoming, and they hadn’t even started.

“You do realize suggesting that a first year has anything to do with You-Know-Who is ridiculous, right?” He locked eyes with the third years. The Hufflepuff just looked surprised at his words, like the idea that a child might be innocent of war crimes hadn’t even occurred to him, but the Ravenclaw looked away fairly quickly. At least, they both looked significantly less proud of being faced with the stupidity of their actions than Smith did.

This would be easier than he’d thought; he’d been a bit worried that the other students would be like Crabbe and Goyle, all muscle and little brain for Harry to work with, but he was in luck and instead they were only a little dumber than average. Smith had clearly simply tinkered with their morals a little, blinded them with stories about the war. Harry would be happy to repay the favor.

“The war has been over for a decade, Smith, that’s a really poor excuse for attacking a classmate. Be honest with me, why did you really do this? Were you just trying to act tough in front of others by ganging up on a first-year?”

Smith’s face twisted. “I’m not lying! His parents were Death Eaters, and they attacked my family.”

Harry made sure his expression wore traces of pity and sadness for this next bit. “Setting aside the issue that Nott had nothing to do with it...look, your families all fought in the war, and I understand that. My parents were also part of the war. They fought for the Light, for what they believed in,

and they..." He swallowed, as if the thought still brought him pain. "...they were killed for it."

He paused for the effect, because of course they knew that, everyone knew. He was the Boy-Who-Lived, of course, but now it was important that he also be the Boy-Who-Lived-And-Whose-Parents-Died-In-His-Place, and from the pitying look the Hufflepuff third year was giving him and the way Weasley's face had twisted with guilt, it was working as intended.

He continued, now looking determined. "But you don't see me going around beating up other students for that. What on earth is that supposed to accomplish? Do you really think your family would be proud of you for beating up other kids at school? So brave, so honorable, jumping on people when their backs are turned. Really something to feel good about."

Smith looked like he wanted to punch Harry. Part of Harry wanted him to do it, just so he would have an excuse to defend himself. But that would only help Smith, in the long run. Harry had many plans, and they required his patience.

He turned towards the third year Ravenclaw who had first looked ashamed. "In a war, you have to make difficult choices, you have to do things that you would never do if you didn't have to, that no one wants to do. In war, you sometimes have to hurt people to protect those you love." He turned to focus directly on Smith, making sure his expression showed sternness with a smattering of sadness. "What you *don't* do is attack your classmates, who have literally nothing to do with it, just because of who their parents are. That's not war, that's just you being a bullying arsehole."

"His parents followed You-Know-Who, and he did all kinds of terrible things," Smith blurted out. "Are we supposed to just not defend ourselves? He never fought fair, why should we?"

It was clearly the kind of argument he'd used, and that had worked, when trying to convince the third years initially. But that was before Harry had said his piece, and now it sounded ridiculous. The Ravenclaw cringed visibly at his words, and Weasley looked away. Even the other Hufflepuff was starting to realize how bad Smith's reasoning sounded.

"You're really saying you want to follow in You-Know-Who's footsteps?" Harry retorted, incredulity coating his tone and expression. Part of it was even honest; Smith couldn't begin to see the hole he was creating for himself. "He was terrible and immoral, and that sounds like a good idea to you? Attacking Nott in a group when he was going to the Library, alone, because it's something he would have done?"

Smith turned red, clearly realizing he'd messed up but not knowing how to fix it. "That's different! He's Dark!"

"You're just using that as an excuse! He's an eleven-year-old first year; you all beat him up so badly he had to stay at the Hospital Wing for two nights, and you're really trying to justify it by blaming it on magic he was born with? Do you even understand how awful that is?"

Smith sneered. "You can't talk Potter! You've gone over to their side, we don't care what you have to say!"

But clearly the other people in the room did care, and they were all looking deeply uncomfortable with having ever sided with Smith.

Harry wanted to laugh. They might be older than Smith, but Smith was clearly the ring-leader and, to be honest, Harry didn't really care about them. This was their first offense, and Harry believed in leniency. Besides, they would be useful in other ways.

But Smith was a self-righteous, narrow-minded prick who had been bullying kids since he'd entered Hogwarts, and likely long before then.

Smith he would enjoy humiliating.

And to do so, he first needed to isolate him. Smith was doing practically all of the heavy lifting already; all Harry needed was to do was provide a little *guidance*.

Harry sighed, seemingly resigned. "I know we don't all necessarily see eye to eye, and that our families may have different values and ideals. But as *humans*, maybe, just maybe, we can agree that what you did was out of line? That, Dark or Light, no one should feel proud of sending an innocent kid to the Hospital Wing with broken ribs?"

"Potter, we aren't--"

"Smith, stop," the third year Hufflepuff interrupted firmly, putting his hand on Housemate's shoulder. Harry suppressed a smirk. Finally.

Smith spun around with a glare, shoving off his hand. "You're going to defend the Death Eaters, Towler?!"

The Ravenclaw rolled his eyes, crossing his arms over his chest. "Smith, they're not Death Eaters. They're fucking first years," he retorted, shaking his head in frustration. He looked to Harry. "Potter...I really don't know what we were thinking. We just..." he sighed self-deprecatingly. "...no, you're right. This has nothing to do with our families. It *is* a pathetic excuse." He grimaced. "I'm sorry. I can't say I like Slytherins but that doesn't make what we did right. We were out of line."

Smith whirled to him, snarling. "What, you're going to just let--"

"Shut up already!" Towler snapped angrily, his face red. Smith was stunned into silence. "Look, Smith, I get it, alright? My family fought in the war, too. My dad was hurt; my aunt was killed, so I get it, *believe* me, I get it. It's why I agreed with you in the first place, but..." He ran a hand through his hair, letting out a deep breath.

"But Potter's right. Attacking a first year for no reason is the kind of thing You-Know-Who would have done." He scowled. "My parents would be incredibly ashamed if they ever found out. I really can't believe I let you talk me into this." He gestured to Draco and Pansy with a frown. "And yes, maybe their parents are Death Eaters. But they're not the ones ganging up on kids and sending them to the Hospital Wing."

To that, finally, Smith had no answer.

Towler turned to Harry. "I'm really sorry about all of this, Potter. I'll talk to the other Hufflepuff students, too. I know some of them have messed with Slytherins, and...I agree with you. This kind of thing, it isn't right."

Harry nodded to him with a small smile. "I'm glad you think so. I don't like to see anyone getting hurt over something like this." He then looked at Smith, his smile dropping into a cold frown. "I won't ask you to apologize to Nott, because I know you don't feel any guilt for hurting him at all. But for your own sake, Smith, I hope you realize that what you did was vile. And if you're worried about anyone here being a bad person, you should start with looking at yourself."

For an instant, Smith looked like he might blow up again, but he surprised Harry by managing to swallow his anger and just shoot him a glare, before stomping out of the classroom.

The two third years nodded in Harry's direction, and left the class too.

Ron, who had been completely silent the entire time, took in a breath.

"Is he...Is Nott okay?"

Harry raised an eyebrow at him. "He's fine. Why do you ask?"

Ron swallowed. "I wanted to apologize to him, if he would be alright with that."

"Depends on what you did."

Ron stared at his shoes. "I didn't...I didn't do anything. I didn't actually hurt him...but I didn't help him either. I just stood there." He pushed his hands into his pant pockets. "When Smith told me we were going to go after a Slytherin, I thought it was just going to be us making fun of someone, I don't know."

Draco gave him an unimpressed look and he grimaced. "That's not great either, I know. But I really wasn't expecting for him to just pull Nott into an empty classroom and..." he paused, looking genuinely upset. "and when they started hitting him I didn't do anything. Just stood there. I knew it was wrong but..."

Pansy scoffed. "What a Gryffindor thing to do, standing to the side when someone's being assaulted. Really brave and honorable of you."

"Pansy, stop," Harry said gently. He knew that she was pissed, and he agreed with the sentiment, but Ron admitting his fault directly was even better than he'd expected of the hot-headed boy; kicking him when he was down wasn't going to help their cause. She shot Harry a glare, but went silent.

He turned to Ron with a disappointed frown. "Weasley, I'll be honest, that really wasn't very brave of you." Ron's shoulders dropped. "But, I do respect that you know you were wrong, and that you want to apologize to Nott, even if you didn't actively participate. Maybe not right now, but I'll let you know if he's willing to listen later."

Ron nodded. "Thank you. And sorry, again."

"Why is everyone apologizing to me? I wasn't involved in any of this." Harry murmured under his breath, a bit exasperated. "In any case, if you really feel bad about what happened, try to talk to other Gryffindors and stop them from just...attacking random students in packs?"

Ron looked down, embarrassed. "I don't think they'll listen to me."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Certainly not with that attitude. Come on, Weasley, isn't your brother a Gryffindor Prefect? Surely he'd support your house not being known for bullying other students."

Ron scowled. "At least my House isn't known for being slimy snakes," he snapped, before suddenly realizing what he'd said and going completely red.

Harry sighed. This was a little closer to what he'd initially expected would happen, although he was glad he'd managed to avoid it. But apparently Draco was a little too good at riling the other boy up; he'd take that into consideration in the future. "Weasley, I'm not asking you to get along with us, and I'm certainly not asking to be friends. All we want is to not have to be worried that other students will punch us out of the blue because they hold bigoted ideas of what Light and Dark wizards are." Ron looked like he wanted to argue that point, but Harry continued before he

could. "I don't want to get into that right now, even though I'm sure we all have very interesting opinions on the issue. I just wanted to say that if you don't want to talk to the other Gryffindors, that's fine, and we're not holding it against you." He shrugged. "I suppose it *is* too much to ask of someone who would just stand there and do nothing to help someone in need."

He turned to Pansy and Draco. "Come on, let's go."

"Wait!"

He looked back towards Ron with a raised eyebrow. "What is it?"

Ron's face was still red, but he looked determined. "I'll talk to them. I don't know if they'll listen to me, but I'll try."

"Trying all we need," Harry replied.

Ron nodded awkwardly, and left the room.

Once he was sure they had left, Harry turned back to Pansy and Draco with a smile. "That went well!"

Draco looked faintly impressed. "I have to say, Potter, I really didn't think you had it in you."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you're usually not so..."

"Manipulative," Pansy finished for him when Draco hesitated. "You're not really who I'd describe as the most socially perceptive person in our House, to say the least."

Harry wanted to refute her, but he knew she had a point. "That's different," he said, with some consternation. "This kind of thing doesn't have anything to do with 'social perception'. I know what they think and what they want to hear, so it's pretty easy to work with. As long as I'm trying to get them to believe something specific, I can act it out without trouble."

"So as long as it isn't real, it's simple?" Draco asked, giving Harry a calculating look.

Harry wasn't sure he liked what the blond was implying, but he also wasn't completely wrong. "Not exactly," he said with a shrug. "It's more about precision. When I'm around you guys I don't really have any kind of plan, so it all gets messy really quickly. I'm not great at 'perceiving' feelings on the fly. But if I have a specific point I'm trying to make, and especially if I already know what the other person's perspective on the issue is, it all just becomes...predictable?"

Draco's expression did not change. It made Harry slightly nervous.

"In any case, you're surprisingly convincing," Pansy said with a raised eyebrow. "You'd be a pretty decent politician."

Harry grimaced. "That idea needs to die. You are both well aware that I would hate that kind of career."

"True, but it's still unfortunate. We could really use your talents."

"Yes, well, I think I have other talents."

"Do you really?" Draco asked with feigned shock. "Why don't you ever show them to us?"

Harry swatted at his arm, glad the other boy was no longer looking at him like he wasn't sure what to make of Harry. "Prick."

"Resorting to violence now, are we Potter?"

Pansy snorted. "Alright, you two, let's go get dinner. Anger makes me hungry."

Chapter End Notes

"Weasley, I'll be honest, that wasn't very cash money of you."

I believe in canon Smith is one year below Harry, but I needed him this year so here we are. Also Towler is now a Hufflepuff instead of a Gryffindor :D 'Not Canon Compliant' is a crucial tag to this story, let me tell you.

I have re-written this chapter like ten times, easily. That whole conversation with Smith? boy howdy. at LEAST ten times.

Comments and kudos are always welcome, it makes me really happy to know you are enjoying the story!

Thank you for reading <3

Filum

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“It really surprises me that you are having so much trouble with this,” Blaise said, looking up from his book. He’d been reading for the past few hours, partially as an excuse to observe as Harry struggled to make a book move with ‘Leviosa’. “You are quite powerful, I can tell, but you can’t even cast ‘Leviosa’?”

“If you aren’t going to contribute anything positive, then please keep quiet,” Harry snapped, thoroughly annoyed. Not with Blaise, exactly, but with his current predicament.

It was two months before the First Year Examinations, and he had a pretty good idea of what kinds of spells he would be asked to perform. He had no problems whatsoever with Potions or Herbology, or the material in History of Magic or Astronomy, but Transfiguration, Charms and DADA would have him casting spells directly in front of his teachers, and he had to figure out a way to fool them into thinking he was doing it their way from up close. He wouldn’t be able to get away with covertly casting Latin magic as usual, and he refused to fail his first year exams when none of this was even his fault, really.

So Harry had spent a good deal of time trying to figure out how to cast spells that looked like he was casting them with a wand, while instead casting them with wandless Latin magic. So far, he’d tried a few theories, with varying degrees of failure and not a single success; the one he was testing now was his fourth.

The basic idea was, he’d say the words for the spell and make the correct wand movements while simultaneously stopping the spell from being cast by the wand by keeping a tight hold on his magic. A dud version of the spell, if you will, to make it seem like he was casting it ‘properly’. Then, he’d quickly, wordlessly cast the spell in Latin, and hopefully it would be smooth enough that no one would catch on to the trick.

It sounded good on paper, but there was a fairly big problem with this method.

Casting Latin magic wordlessly was fairly difficult in itself. Harry was capable of casting certain Latin spells without saying the words, but they required very careful concentration and a very clear idea of what he wanted to happen. As with other things, however, practice made perfect, and the more he cast any particular spell over and over, the more it came to him easily when he thought of it. He had no trouble with casting *Volito* silently at this point, since he’d been using the spell for years. But it was casting it while also preventing the wand from taking his magic at the same time that *really* made the whole thing practically impossible.

As with casting wordless magic, keeping his magic from being taken by the Holly wand was difficult in itself. Wands were designed to take magic from a wizard without their conscious knowledge of it, for the most part, and certainly without their permission. Which meant that Harry had to exert a lot of control to stop his magic from going into the wand even as it got forcefully pulled from him, and given how slippery his magic tended to be this was much easier said than done. It turned what should have been a tricky but reasonable problem into a very strange and extremely taxing mental exercise.

The closest comparison he could think of to the whole process was trying to draw two pictures simultaneously, one with each hand. But in addition to that, what he was using to draw were

actually two extremely slippery eels, one of which was desperately trying to escape his grasp and would explode if he made any mistakes in his drawing, and the other of which required his constant supervision or it would just stop drawing and then disappear. Or also explode. Either way, it meant the spell would fail, and Harry would just have to try again from the beginning.

Which explained why he wasn't being particularly successful with this theory either, but at this point he was running out of time and sanity. He just wanted *something* to work, even just once, but so far he'd been working on this for months with zero (0) positive results.

His only hope was that, once he figured out how to do it properly once, it would become significantly easier to figure it out in the future, like learning to ride a bicycle. It had worked like that with the rest of his magic, so he felt comfortable in assuming that it would work with this situation too.

He focused once again on the book in front of him trying his best to block out Blaise's presence. There was no one else in the Common Room at that time, so it was ideal practicing conditions.

Once he'd mastered casting *Volito* silently in private, to the point where he could control the spell with almost no thought, he'd decided to practice the entire charade in the semi-public space of their Common Room. He'd have to take the exam in front of McGonagall and Flitwick, and potentially other students, so he wanted to get used to having other people watching him as he tried to cast his spells as quickly as possible. It hurt Harry's pride deeply, to have his peers think he was incapable of casting something as simple as 'Leviosa', but he comforted himself with the knowledge that once he figured it out once, he'd most likely have no problems in the future, and they'd all just assume he had trouble adjusting initially. Thankfully, Draco knew he was having problems because of his wand, even if he didn't know the exact details, so he was a good barrier between Harry and anyone who might accuse him of being weak or stupid.

About a month and a half ago, Blaise had begun to insist on being with Harry while he worked on his spells. Harry had initially been slightly annoyed by the other boy's persistence, but Blaise was usually pretty quiet so eventually Harry just let him do as he pleased. It wasn't like he disliked Blaise, but Harry was just feeling particularly stressed by his constant failures. He knew Blaise had a high opinion of him and this wouldn't affect that, but even if he wasn't worried about displaying weakness in front of the dark-haired boy, it still grated that he couldn't even explain that this really wasn't his fault. In any case, by this point Harry had grown used to having Blaise around while he practiced, and the other boy's presence in the room felt natural. Safe.

Which meant his usual guard was down when Blaise suddenly asked him, "Darling, could you pass me that quill on the table next to you?"

"Mhm," Harry murmured, completely focused on his wordless *Volito* and on the book in front of him, and only giving a passing thought to Blaise's request.

A loud thud suddenly broke Harry's concentration, and he turned to where Blaise had dropped his book onto the floor, his face a mask of shock and disbelief.

Harry knew what that look meant.

"How...what..." Blaise sputtered, staring at the quill that was now in his lap. He brought his eyes up to stare at Harry. "You did wandless, wordless magic!"

Harry wanted to scream.

Part of Harry wanted to think that the whole thing had happened completely by accident. That he'd

been keeping everything perfectly under control, and that none of this was his fault at all. But Harry wasn't really in the business of deceiving himself, and he knew that that was a complete lie. He had a *very* good idea of what had just happened and why, loathe as he was to admit it.

Harry knew he was overly stressed, not to mention extremely tired, due to how much time he'd been investing in getting the wand to work lately. This was obviously affecting his control over both his mind and his magic, and had probably been making the whole process even harder for him, but he was running out of time and he had no results for all the effort he'd put in. Even that might not have been too bad, all things considered; usually when he felt overly tired his magic just refused to work. But he'd practiced casting *Volito* wordlessly so much that at this point he could probably do it in his sleep, so the offhanded question had easily been capable of creating enough intent in some subconscious part of his brain to trigger the spell, even exhausted as he was.

Harry also knew that his own comfort levels around Blaise were a big part of why he'd slipped up that badly. He would never have been that careless around anyone else; for Merlin's sake, he lived in the same *room* with Draco and he'd never messed up this badly.

So It made *sense*, but still. Harry reserved the right to feel slightly betrayed by his magic.

Putting his frustrations aside, he tried his best to paste mild confusion onto his features. "What?" he asked. His voice cracked slightly, and he suppressed a flinch. "What are you talking about, Blaise? I didn't do anything." He was hoping to pretend that nothing had happened, or at least that Harry hadn't been involved in any way. He did suppose it was hard to pretend nothing had happened at all, given that Blaise had seen the quill very clearly fly in his direction and land on his lap. But Harry was holding a wand, so maybe he could at least say it hadn't been wandless? Even though he hadn't pointed the wand in the quill's direction at all, or at Blaise, or made the proper hand movements, or done any of the other things that were strictly necessary for using a wand with this kind of spell? Maybe there was a chance Blaise had suffered temporary brain damage which meant he wasn't as observant as usual and just hadn't *noticed* Harry saying the words or waving his wand, even though the other boy had been looking directly at him?

But Harry's - fairly unrealistic - hopes were quickly dashed as Blaise's expression turned from shock into awe, clearly not falling for his act. Then, within a few moments, back to his usual half-bored half-amused look, with a glint of something else buried in his eyes.

"You aren't a very good actor, I'm sorry to say. Not good enough to fool me, at least." He grinned lazily. "But if you'd like me to pretend nothing happened here, then I can do that."

Harry stared at him with narrowed eyes, dropping the earlier facade. "Really." He didn't know how to feel at Blaise's reaction. It seemed too easy, too convenient.

Blaise shrugged, unconcerned. He reached down and picked up the book he'd dropped, dusting it off carefully.

However, despite his appearance of nonchalance, he could not hide his magic from Harry. His magic - which was usually so deliberate and controlled - was now flickering around him with a panicked, fluttering, jolting kind of movement that reminded Harry of a trapped rabbit.

He realized, suddenly, that Blaise was willing to keep his secret without asking any questions because he was *scared* of Harry.

The thought frustrated him. Did Blaise really think that Harry would hurt him? What impression was he giving that made his friends fear for their safety around him?

But Blaise was right to be cautious, he corrected himself. Many of the children from Dark families had grown up knowing that some things were best left untouched, and that secrets learned accidentally could lead to a lot of pain. Being able to do wandless, wordless magic indicated that a wizard was extremely strong, not to mention how powerful someone of Harry's age would end up being if he was capable of it now. And yes, Harry might not be an insane Dark Lord *now*, but who was to say he wouldn't become one in the future? Voldemort hadn't started off insane either.

Harry gave a deep sigh. He slowly moved over to sit next to Blaise on the couch, noting how the other boy tensed at his proximity, when usually he'd be the one to seek it out.

"Blaise, I'm not going to hurt you," he said softly. As helpful as having Blaise terrified of what Harry might do in retaliation for not keeping his secret was, Harry really didn't want to have their friendship ruined because of a freak accident like this. It wasn't like Blaise had invaded his privacy or even purposefully tried to figure out Harry's magic. If anything, he was a victim to Harry's own distraction, and it was now up to Harry to fix his mistake.

Blaise's expression flickered, clearly not expecting Harry to notice his fear. "And I swear I won't tell anyone about this, Potter." Blaise using his last name when he'd called Harry 'darling' just a minute ago stung in a way Harry would never have expected. What was worse was that his voice had turned incredibly polite, almost subservient. "You said you would help us, so you have my loyalty. I have no intention of betraying you."

Harry hated this.

"That's not what I'm talking about." He ran a hand through his hair, frustrated. "I like you and I know you like me too, and I don't want you to start acting weird around me just because you think I'm powerful. I want you to keep this a secret because I'm asking you to, not because you think that I'll hurt you if you don't." He sighed. "I said I would help all of you, help to bring equality to all your families, and I will do my best. But I want you to support me because you also believe in that, and because you believe in me. I definitely *don't* want your loyalty out of fear."

Blaise seemed a bit shocked by his declaration. But then, his magic relaxed slightly, and he gave Harry a flirtatious smirk. "You like me, huh?" he said, his tone teasing.

Harry felt his face flush. "Oh for...of course that's the part you'd focus on." But he managed to power through his embarrassment, knowing that it was Blaise's attempt to lower the tension. "But seriously, I don't want anyone knowing. I..."

He hadn't planned on revealing his magic to anyone just yet. But Harry trusted Blaise as much as he trusted anyone, maybe a little bit more. He knew the dark-haired boy was good at keeping secrets, and he was already keeping many about Harry specifically without asking anything in return. And now Blaise had just seen him cast wordless, wandless magic with almost no thought behind it, so the damage was already done. All in all, maybe it wouldn't be so bad to just...tell him. It couldn't be worse than just leaving him to speculate by himself on what Harry was capable of.

Harry took a deep breath. Here went nothing. "The truth is, I've been having trouble with spells because I've been able to perform wandless magic since I knew magic existed. I can do all kinds of things with it, even very powerful spells. It was always really easy for me, and I never really thought there was another method until I came to Hogwarts. Casting magic with a wand feels...unnatural, and my magic keeps fighting it, so I'm clearly having some control issues." He sighed. "But in general I'd rather people didn't know I have this ability. I don't like standing out in the first place, and with something like this I can only imagine how much attention it will bring, especially given that I'm The-Boy-Who-Lived and all that rubbish. I just don't want any trouble. So as far as I'm concerned, the less people that know the better."

Harry wondered momentarily if Blaise would even believe him, but one look at the other boy told him that would not be an issue. Blaise was listening to his explanation with undisguised wonder, and Harry had to fight down a blush that was threatening to appear. He had gotten used to Blaise being attractive, and it didn't usually affect him anymore, but Blaise had also never looked at him quite like this. His magic, too, was flickering around him in a lively dance that was in stark contrast to its usual stiffness, and it made Harry wonder how much Blaise was usually holding himself back.

"That's incredible," Blaise said, looking and sounding genuinely amazed. "You're incredible."

He didn't sound like he was saying it as a joke or teasing him at all, and that made it even worse. Harry felt himself go red instantly, flustered by Blaise's honest praise like he hadn't been in a good while. "Stop that. Please, just act normal. This doesn't have to be a big deal. I don't want it to be a big deal."

Blaise was clearly surprised by his words, stunned momentarily. Then, he seemed to carefully bring himself back under control, fitting his standard expression back into place almost like a physical mask. But his eyes still shone with an unusual sparkling curiosity, and his magic was still whirling around him, if more subdued than before.

"Can I ask you a question?"

Harry nodded, a bit warily. Anyone would be curious. "Go ahead. I can't promise I'll answer."

Blaise gave him a small smile. "I really wasn't expecting you to tell me anything in the first place. Frankly, I'm kind of honored. It is a bit crazy to think about, but it actually makes much more sense than assuming you're a Squib, like other people have been. I obviously knew *that* was impossible," he said with some scorn.

Harry avoided his eyes, still not sure of how to act around Blaise now that his secret was out. He felt exposed, raw. "Right. So. What's the question?"

"You said you've been performing wandless magic all your life," Blaise said carefully, "but you didn't mention anything about it being wordless. Is that because there's something else to it?"

If Harry was being honest, he had expected Blaise to pick up on that. He'd left it out on purpose, unsure of how to even talk about the Latin, or if he should at all. Part of him wanted to have someone to discuss it with...but part of him was scared.

It was one thing to be able to do wandless magic. It wasn't exactly common, but he knew that there were plenty of other strong wizards and witches who were capable of it, if maybe not to his extent.

But Latin magic was a whole different beast.

"Blaise," he said carefully, "I'm not sure I should be telling you this."

"You don't have to," Blaise replied. "But you can if you want to. You can trust me."

Harry peered at him carefully. He did trust him. Merlin help him. "I can do magic that isn't...normal," he said finally. Blaise listened intently. "It goes beyond wandless magic, it's something completely different to what I've seen anybody do."

"In what way?" Blaise asked, and Harry noted with some amusement that he was doing his best to act as normal as possible. He appreciated the effort, sincerely.

Harry took in a deep breath, looking out one of the enchanted windows of the Common Room. "It's hard to describe. It's based on Latin, which I'm fluent in, and my ideas and intentions. Simple things, like creating light, are very easy. *Illuminare*," he said, and a small light suddenly shone above his open palm. He'd never so easily displayed his magic for someone, and he suddenly got the urge to show off some of the things he could do with it; in for a penny, in for a pound, as they say. He moved the light in a swirl around his arm, up to his shoulder, on top of his head, then silently snuffed it out by cutting off its power. Blaise watched it all happen with a gobsmacked expression on his face.

"Merlin. You weren't joking."

Harry laughed. "No, I'm not. And I can do a lot of other things too, although most aren't that simple."

"Simple, he says," Blaise murmured with what sounded like disbelief mixed with exasperation. Harry grinned at him. Blaise had no idea.

"I can only do wordless magic with simpler spells I've used a lot, though, like *Volito*."

"*Volito*?" Blaise repeated, and Harry noted that his accent was almost perfect. "Like, *volo*, flying?"

"Do you speak Italian?" Harry asked him, suddenly curious. He'd known Blaise was part Italian, but he hadn't really thought about the language. Blaise nodded.

"Not fluently, since I've been living in England my whole life, but my mom made sure I at least had a good base."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. An idea suddenly occurred to him, and he gave Blaise a considering look. "Italian is Latin's descendant language, so you might be able to understand some Latin through it. I wonder if I could teach you to use this kind of magic?"

Blaise's eyes widened. "You really think I could?"

"I have no idea. I've never heard of anyone else doing this," Harry said with a small shrug. "and to be honest I have no idea how to even start. For one, you might have to learn how to speak Latin. I don't know if just knowing Italian is enough, or if even memorizing one word would work."

Blaise hummed thoughtfully. "I could just try the one word thing for a while, see if I can get it even a little bit. *Illuminare* seems harmless enough."

Harry shook his head. "You don't understand. It's not really about the Latin, it's more about having control over your own magic and understanding what you want to happen," Harry tried to explain. "*Illuminare* specifies my intentions, but I also need to fully understand what is happening with the particles involved, while also being careful to feed the spell the correct amount of magic for it to work. The physics knowledge and having control over how your magic works are the hard parts. If I just say a word, nothing happens."

Blaise was once again staring at him with wide eyes. "Particles? Physics? Feed the spell? What does any of that even mean?"

Harry blinked at him. He hadn't really taken into account exactly how difficult it would be to get anyone else to use his magic, especially wizards who had never even heard of things like physics. How could he expect Blaise to understand the intricacies of maintaining a magical photon source enough to cast something like *Illuminare* when he didn't even know photons existed? "...I didn't really think this through."

Blaise stared at him. "This is much more complicated than using wands, isn't it?"

"Yeah. It's...uh...a bit more complicated," Harry said with a grimace. "I've been using this method for so long, I've grown used to it. But it would take some time to even learn the very basics of science, not to mention figuring out how to control your own magic."

Blaise stared at him for a few more seconds in silence, before suddenly turning to the ceiling with a loud sigh. "Ah, that's disappointing. I was hoping I could learn to do some wandless magic like you, just so I could lord it over Draco. He'd be so jealous." He suddenly froze, and shifted to look back at Harry. "Does anyone else know about this?"

Harry hummed thoughtfully. "Snape found out by accident. He doesn't actually know much, just about the Latin, but I've been thinking about explaining it to him for a while. Draco knows that I'm having trouble with the wand specifically, but he doesn't know about my magic."

Blaise raised an eyebrow. "Are you ever going to tell him?"

"Probably," Harry replied, sighing. "He knows a lot of things, so I'll tell him about this at some point. But not right now, I hadn't really planned on anyone finding out for a while. Both you and Snape were accidents, and he still doesn't really know anything."

Blaise nodded, staying silent for a moment. Then, his expression turned suddenly sly.

"You know, Harry," he said, turning to him. "You were right."

Harry frowned, suspicious about the sudden change in topic. "About what?"

Blaise's mouth curved into a grin, his eyes hooded, and he leaned in slightly. "I do like you too. Very much."

"Merlin!" Harry exclaimed, scrambling to put more space between them, glaring at Blaise as he burst out laughing. He could feel his face burning in embarrassment at his reaction, but honestly, he was glad Blaise was once again teasing him as usual. Harry had feared things would get awkward between them, but clearly this wouldn't be an issue.

"Sorry, sorry, you're just very fun to tease," Blaise apologized after a few seconds, finally getting his laughter under control.

Harry huffed, taking out his wand once again. "I'm glad I could bring you entertainment." He felt much more relaxed about practicing in front of Blaise, now that the other boy knew his secret. It was an unexpectedly welcome outcome to what could have otherwise been a disastrous situation. His face twisted as he looked at the Holy wand once again, already dreading what he suspected would be the hours upon hours of worthless toil that lay ahead of him.

Noticing his reluctance, Blaise considered the wand in his hand thoughtfully for a few seconds. "Can I ask one more question? It might be a stupid one."

"What is it?"

"Since the wand is giving you so much trouble, and you can cast magic easily without one, is there a reason you're not just using a stick instead?"

Harry stared at him for a few seconds, then pressed his face into his hands and let out a little scream.

"So...is that a no?" Blaise asked, clearly already knowing the answer.

"I'm so *stupid*," Harry mumbled with a groan, his voice muffled.

Months. *Months* of his time wasted. He wanted to cry.

Blaise gave him a pitying look. "You just tunneled into needing the wand to work, didn't you?"

"I can't believe this."

"It's alright, it happens to the best of us."

"*Months*, Blaise! I've been trying to get this wand to work for *months*!"

Blaise looked torn between feeling sorry for him and just wanting to laugh. "At least now you know?"

Harry made a small whining noise in the back of his throat. He stuffed the Holly wand in his pocket and went back to his room, only to emerge a few minutes later with the Invisibility Cloak stuffed in a bag.

He didn't bother checking to see if Blaise was looking his way. He was grateful to the other boy, truly, but his general annoyance at the situation was overshadowing all other emotions right now.

"Months," he muttered. "*Months*."

As soon as he was outside of the portrait, he quickly looked around to check no one was around. Once confirmed, he cast *Effugiat* to prevent anyone from noticing him and then took out the Invisibility Cloak and covered himself with it. He didn't want anyone to know what he was about to do. He didn't want anyone asking any questions, or even noticing that he'd been outside the castle at all. He didn't want anyone making any connections between where Harry was going right now and his suddenly significantly better control with magic. Because he knew, without even testing it once, that Blaise's solution would work.

"A fucking stick," he cursed under his breath as he approached the edge of the Forbidden Forest, where there were many smaller trees and plenty of branches lying around. He kicked at a falling leaf with a small angry huff, taking out the Holly wand so he could easily use it as a reference when finding its replacement. "I just needed a fucking stick all along. *Months*!"

It was the day before they had to leave Hogwarts for Summer Break, and Harry couldn't sleep.

He'd passed his exams easily, once he'd gotten used to having a fake wand. After walking around the outer edge of the Forbidden Forest for about an hour, he'd found a piece of wood that had a very similar color to that of his Holly wand and, with a fair amount of cutting and polishing and a subtle use of *Fies*, he'd managed to create a fairly passable facsimile. Harry didn't think anyone would be able to tell them apart, except probably Ollivander but that didn't count. Even Harry would have been fooled if he wasn't paying close attention, and he'd spent a lot of time around the Holly wand for the last few months. *Months*. The thought still brought a wave of annoyance rushing through him.

He *had* thanked Blaise profusely after he'd gotten back from his expedition. It certainly wasn't the other boy's fault Harry had gotten so deep into his problem that he'd completely overlooked the obvious solution. He shuddered to think how much longer it would have taken him to come up with it on his own.

As it turned out, learning how to use the fake wand so that it truly appeared to be a regular wand had been an interesting and fairly difficult experience onto itself. For one, Harry had realized he couldn't necessarily always just use a similar Latin spell and hope that no one looked at him too closely. There were some spells that had very specific visual cues, like *Protego*'s wispy white shield, and although he wasn't going to have to demonstrate that spell for a few years yet, he had to make sure he was capable of copying the whole spell if he wanted to properly fool anyone. On the bright side, *Protego* was actual, real Latin, which meant Harry would never have to cast it wordlessly at all. The knowledge that there *were* some common spells that used actual Latin was almost enough for him to overlook all the ones that weren't. But *Protego* was by far the exception rather than the rule, and to make it worse, most spells had appearances that had very little to do with their actual effects.

What that meant was that, instead of just memorizing the spell's incantation and the wand movement like everyone else, Harry instead had to memorize five things per spell; the incantation, the wand movement, any visual effects he might have to emulate, what Latin spell best simulated the spell itself, and how much magic to allow the spell to function as needed.

It was also significantly harder for him to actually use the spells. While everyone else basically could just let their wands take their magic, Harry had to: balance two spells at once - for those with visuals - wordlessly, while also saying a gibberish word that was completely unrelated to either of them, and also perform the wand movement for the spell, *and* make sure it all looked seamless and effortless and not at all like he was having to keep track of and juggle six things at once.

Easy!

That was a lie, of course. It was very difficult, and required incredible amounts of concentration on his part, especially in the beginning. It had taken him another month - and more sleepless nights - after he'd first acquired the fake wand to get the hang of the entire charade with 'Wingardium Leviosa' alone, but after months (*MONTHS*) of zero success with the Holly wand Harry was ecstatic with those results. As it turned out, *not* having his magic constantly being jerked on by his wand made the process significantly easier. And thankfully, once he'd gotten the hang of it once, it was fairly simple to learn how to fake most other spells, if still time consuming. By the time the exams rolled around Harry was capable of performing two out of the three spells that were required with very little trouble, which was worse than he'd hoped but still infinitely better than what he would have been able to accomplish if he'd still been using the Holly wand.

Transfiguration was the one class where he ran into serious difficulties, due to the fact that the final exam involved a living animal. Eventually he'd ended up having to improvise, because maintaining control over *Fies* wordlessly while also attempting to make it transform an entire mouse into a snuffbox was completely beyond Harry's current abilities. So instead of transforming the mouse itself, Harry had settled for using the air surrounding it to form a snuffbox that went around the mouse instead, like a teeny tiny little house. Transforming nitrogen into silver was as easy as with any other element, and because air was all around the mouse, it was easy to make the *Fies* look like Transfiguration by making it slowly cover the small animal like a blanket. Reversing the spell was also simple; he merely removed the silver-snuffbox-blanket and voila, the mouse was back. Transfiguration!

In the end, McGonagall still took some points off because his Transfigured snuffbox moved. Harry

hadn't yet figured out how to make an animal go into temporary stasis without killing it, so he took the penalty without complaint. Besides, he'd managed to make the snuffbox pretty enough that his score was fairly high to begin with, so even with the points lost he still got an Acceptable in the class. It was a pretty terrible grade, but given how he'd been completely incapable of performing any Transfiguration up until that point, Harry was just glad he'd passed at all. He'd do better next year, obviously. He also knew he'd have to figure out a better method for next year's exam, but he decided he'd worry about that later. Now it was time to worry about his Summer Break.

At the very least, he knew he wouldn't be going back to the Dursleys. For all they knew or cared he'd died in an alley somewhere last August, and he had no intention of proving them wrong. The only person who he felt bad about not seeing again was Sandy, but given everything that had happened since he'd entered the Wizarding world, it was probably best he stayed away from her, for her sake. The thought sent a pang of sadness through him, but he shook it away firmly. She would forget about him, with time, and lead a happy life away from all of the mess Harry was planning on getting himself into. It was for the best.

It was for the best, and Harry resolved not to think about it anymore. He would soon have more free time than he knew what to do with, and he intended to make the most of it. He was already looking forward to having his room alone at the Leaky Cauldron to experiment. He liked Draco, sincerely, but he also liked being alone, and that was actually fairly difficult at Hogwarts. Especially when it came to testing out new theories and practicing his magic.

He hadn't talked with Blaise about his magic directly since the initial incident, but they had become closer over their shared knowledge. Harry felt like he'd made the right decision in opening up to him, and not just because of the wand fiasco. Sometimes, when they were alone, he found himself talking to Blaise in Latin, with the other boy responding in Italian, just because it felt nice to be able to use it in conversation even in that middling way. Initially it had been particularly tricky because Blaise wasn't entirely fluent in Italian, and on top of that the two languages were actually fairly different, but they'd managed to make it work for simple conversations pretty well and Harry was satisfied with that. He'd never been able to use Latin so casually before, and it made him happy to be able to use it in that way at all.

But right now it was entirely too early in the morning, and Harry couldn't go to sleep. Eventually he got up, deciding it wasn't worth just lying in his bed like this. Snape had actually cornered him after his Potions Examination, and given him a lecture on taking care of himself, and how not sleeping or eating could hurt his magic and mind permanently, even if Harry felt like he could handle it. But he'd been lying in his bed for hours now, and he was sure he wasn't going to fall asleep any time soon, so he might as well do something productive with his time other than die of boredom.

Besides, another thought had been plaguing him for a little while now.

He wanted to go and check out the Mirror again. The last time, he'd been so stressed out over the stone and Dumbledore, that he hadn't had a chance to see if he could figure out anything new. Besides, now that he knew that Dumbledore had cast a Hiding Spell on it, Harry wanted to see if he could detect it with his magic, maybe get some clues on how it was constructed. He hadn't realized it was there before, but now he knew there was something to look for, and that could make all the difference.

After checking to make sure Draco was fast asleep, he wordlessly cast *Silencio* on himself to make sure he wouldn't wake him up. He then grabbed the Invisibility cloak from his trunk and threw it over his shoulders. His trunk was pretty well spelled against thieves, so it was one of the safest places to store anything he didn't want other people to find. So far the only person who knew

about the cloak was Blaise, because Harry figured it didn't really make sense to keep that information from him given everything else he knew. But in general he definitely wanted to keep the Invisibility Cloak secret since, given its purpose, it was obviously infinitely more useful the less people knew it even existed.

The walk to the mirror was quiet as ever. He knew the path well now, so it only took him a few minutes to reach the room. He slipped inside, careful to make sure no one was around, and then turned.

The room was empty.

Harry stood still, startled. The idea that the mirror might not be there anymore hadn't even crossed his mind.

He felt a moment of regret for not having come earlier in the year; he'd been so worried about being able to cast spells for the final exams, and a bit scared after the whole issue with the stone, that he hadn't had the urge to come seek the mirror. But now that it was gone, he wondered if he'd ever see it again.

He stared at the space where the mirror had stood in silence for a few minutes, a part of him almost missing Henry, although he'd never before felt anything but annoyance towards it. But he still had no idea who, or rather what, Henry was. And, by correlation, what Henry represented about himself. It was a mystery he might never solve, now.

He sighed, turning to exit the room.

And had to stop himself from letting out a scream as he nearly ran into Dumbledore.

“Harry, my boy, is that you?”

Harry felt his heart thudding in his chest. He hadn't heard him enter, or the door opening and closing. “Yes, sir,” he said quietly, letting the cloak fall from around his face. How had Dumbledore known he was here? Did he have a tracking spell on the door?

Dumbledore gave him a soft smile. “You wanted to see your parents again, didn't you?”

Harry had to think for a moment about the lie, then nodded. “Yes.” He frowned. “Did you take the mirror away?”

Dumbledore nodded solemnly. “It had served its purpose. It was not a good idea to leave it here anymore, where students might run into it.” He gave Harry a kind nod. “It is not good to dwell on those that have left us, Harry. We must learn to push forward and live our lives for ourselves.”

Something about the way Dumbledore said the words told Harry he spoke from experience. Harry nodded. “You're right, sir. I suppose I just wanted to say goodbye before I left for the year.”

“Understandable, my boy.”

Harry knew that he could leave it at that, but he still had something that had been bothering him ever since he'd found the mirror. Now was as good a time as ever to ask, he supposed.

“Sir, can I ask you a question?”

“Certainly, my boy.”

“Why did you tell everyone that the third floor corridor was dangerous? I heard a lot of students who wanted to explore, specifically because it sounded wild and adventurous. Surely it would have been better to just say it was off limits because of renovations, or because a pipe burst, or something boring like that?”

Dumbledore looked shocked at his suggestion, and Harry wondered if the thought had simply not occurred to him. Surely after being the Headmaster of a school for as long as Dumbledore had he understood that teenagers had a terrible grasp on their own self-preservation?

“Are you saying I should have lied to everyone about the danger?” Dumbledore replied after a few seconds. Harry’s eyebrows furrowed.

“Well, one, lying to children to keep them safe is a worthy cause, I’d think. Two, the mirror isn’t that dangerous. I thought you’d lied to make people want to find it less, but you just did it... badly?”

Dumbledore stared at him for a moment before bringing a hand to his mouth. “Would you prefer I lie to you to keep you safe, then?”

The question stunned Harry. His immediate, strongest instinct was to say “No”, but that went directly against what he’d just stated. Harry was still a child, and that was true even if he felt that he was different to most other children his age. But maybe he was just being self-centered.

“...I suppose you’re right,” Harry conceded after a few seconds. “I would rather know the truth than be lied to.”

“Even if the truth was dangerous?” Dumbledore probed gently.

“Yes,” Harry said, pausing to think on how to communicate his thoughts properly. “For the record though, that’s just a personal preference. I always feel responsible for my actions, and if I ever make the wrong decision, I’d rather it be because I made a mistake than because I didn’t know something. But if someone won’t or can’t take responsibility for their actions, then they should not be told things they can’t handle.”

Dumbledore hummed noncommittally. “You seem pretty certain that you know what’s best for other people.”

Harry frowned, wondering if Dumbledore was being deliberately obtuse or if he had honestly just misunderstood Harry completely. “Of course I don’t, I never said that. I’m not talking about controlling or policing other people. If anything it’s the opposite; just because knowing as much as possible is ideal for me, that doesn’t make it ideal for everyone else. Knowing too much can be as dangerous as knowing too little, it just depends on knowing what kind of person you are, but obviously no one’s thoughts and decisions are objectively correct.” He paused for a moment. “I suppose what I meant is it’s difficult to judge for yourself if you can handle knowing something if you don’t know what that something is in the first place, so it makes sense that someone else would have to do it for you. But *I’d* always rather know, so that issue is irrelevant in my case.”

His answer seemed to surprise Dumbledore a fair amount. He was quiet for a few seconds, his expression thoughtful as he peered at Harry. Then he gave a deep sigh.

“Are you sure, Harry?”

Harry nodded, not sure what exactly Dumbledore was asking, but willing to stick with his answer. “Yes, sir.”

Dumbledore was silent for a few moments, considering him carefully. "In that case, I will tell you two things," he said finally, slowly. "For the safety of other parties, I cannot reveal too much; but given your past actions and who you are, there are a few things you deserve to know."

Harry perked up, his curiosity piqued.

"The first one is, the room with the mirror was not actually what I was trying to prevent students from reaching in the third floor. I wasn't lying about that warning."

Harry felt his blood chill in his veins.

"Why would you have something that dangerous here?" he asked, alarmed. "Something that could kill students?"

Dumbledore frowned. "There was a great danger that we had to stay vigilant of. Larger than the possibility of students being harmed. Rest easy, however, the dangerous room had many wards preventing students from entering, so you would not have been able to access it as easily as you did the room with the mirror. No student under 7th year would have even been able to detect the room was there, much less be able to open the door to it. And even 7th years would have to know exactly where it was to even attempt to find it. The warning was because we wanted to keep the area clear of students, so that if anyone did attempt to invade the perimeter with malicious intentions we would know immediately."

Harry nodded; Dumbledore's words were reassuring, and indeed he'd been in the third floor multiple times and had never noticed anything was off, or that any room was being hidden. And if he couldn't notice an entire hidden room, with his ability to detect and sense magic, then he doubted anyone else would be able to, even 7th years. But he still had so many questions.

"What danger were we guarding against? Is it gone now? Did it have to do with the stone?" Harry paused. A memory, unbidden, rose in his mind. "Did it have to do with Quirrell?"

Dumbledore's expression tightened at his words, and for a moment Harry worried he'd accidentally angered the old wizard. But then Dumbledore sighed.

"I suppose you know too much at this point for me to keep it all a secret." He looked saddened, and Harry felt irrationally a bit guilty about asking. But he certainly wasn't going to take it back. "Yes, in fact we were specifically guarding the stone from being stolen. I didn't really expect a student would be able to break through my hiding spell." Dumbledore shot Harry a look that appeared mostly amused. Harry smiled back awkwardly. "The reason the mirror was in an unguarded room was that the larger defensive measures had been dismantled by that point, because the danger had already been taken care of."

Harry's eyes widened. "Quirrell's disappearance."

"Precisely," Dumbledore nodded. His expression turned grave. "However, Quirrell himself was not the danger."

Harry frowned. "You mean, the face?"

Dumbledore was silent for a moment. "Are you sure you want to know, Harry? You are so young, and you are safe in Hogwarts. You don't need to bring this on yourself yet."

As much as Harry understood where Dumbledore was coming from, he felt like his Headmaster's worries were not only unfounded, but inappropriate when it came to Harry. If it hadn't been for

him, Quirrell might never have been caught and the stone might have been stolen.

“Sir, if I may,” he said softly, “Hogwarts is not safe. I don't know how long Quirrell was teaching here, or how long he spent planning to steal the stone, but clearly no one suspected him. And if there is ever any danger, as I said, I'd always rather know about it.”

Dumbledore looked pained, but then nodded. “So it must be, then.”

He turned his eyes on Harry, as serious as he'd looked when Harry had told him about the stone in his office, if distinctly less threatening. Instead of being still and icy, his magic thrummed around him, bright and ominous.

“That face you saw, it was no demon, no spirit.”

His voice lowered to a whisper.

“That was Voldemort. He's alive.”

Chapter End Notes

Harry's the kind of person who chooses one path and really STICKS with it, amirite??
Thank you I'll be here all week.

Props to anyone who saw either of these things coming lol

I hope you enjoyed this chapter, thank you so much for all of your support! Your comments and kudos are always appreciated :D
Take care everyone, and thank you for reading <3

** !! MILD SPOILERS !! about when Tom will show up below, read at your own peril **

I've seen a few comments about this, and I feel it's fair I warn you all:

A) Tom will show up *very* soon.

B) Actual romance won't happen for a LONG time. That being said, Tom and Harry's interactions are a huge part of this story and there will be a looooot of them, so if you like the long con aka tag:'slow burn' then oh boy this is the story for you.

Necessitudo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Harry stared out the window of the Hogwarts Express, lost in thought.

He's alive.

Harry didn't know what to think.

He hadn't really considered the possibility that Voldemort had survived that night. Sure, Draco and Blaise had mentioned sightings and suspicious happenings that people thought were linked to the Dark Lord, but Harry had kind of assumed they'd just been imagining things. It certainly wouldn't be the first time people had made things up in their desperation, or just because they were bored.

But looking back on it, if Harry had survived the Killing Curse, it made sense that someone else could too. And if it was going to be anyone, it made sense that it would be the most powerful Dark Lord in history.

But it meant that Harry now had to take him into consideration when making plans for how he would help the Dark families. He'd inadvertently revealed Voldemort's survival to Dumbledore, which meant the Dark Lord was in much greater danger than he would have been otherwise. Harry had some clues of what plans the wraith had had - he knew that Voldemort had been trying to acquire the Stone, and given what the stone was Harry could only assume he had meant to use it to resurrect himself in some way - but now that the stone was gone and Voldemort no longer was possessing Quirrell, he wondered what his next steps would be. Harry felt fairly guilty about his interference, but how could he possibly have known what the wraith was? And besides, he had no way of knowing if Voldemort's plan would have brought him back as insane as he had been when he'd tried to kill Harry, which would be undoubtedly devastating all around.

“You’re cheating!” Lisa Turpin’s exclamation brought him out of his thoughts.

Daphne huffed, looking slightly indignant. “Just because you’re losing doesn’t mean I’m cheating.”

“But I’m pretty good at chess, I shouldn’t be losing *this* badly.”

“If you were any good at chess, you’d know it’s practically impossible to cheat at it in the first place,” Draco drawled from his seat near the window, where he was watching their match with a faintly bored expression. “You both know what each others’ pieces are, where they are, and what they do. Claiming she’s cheating doesn’t make sense, since she’s certainly not taking advice from any of *us*.”

Lisa pouted. “Then how come she’s captured ten of my pieces, and I’ve only gotten two? I just...I don’t understand her moves at all.”

“I think experts would call that ‘being bad’,” Blaise pointed out with some amusement. “Or at least ‘significantly worse than your opponent’, if it makes you feel better.”

Lisa frowned at him, but he raised an eyebrow and she quickly looked away, slightly flustered. “You’re all ganging up on me,” she grumbled. “You’re defending her just ‘cause you’re all Slytherin.”

The mood in the compartment grew slightly tense at her words, but before anyone could respond, Harry started laughing quietly. All eyes instantly turned to him, and he gestured towards Lisa with a friendly smile.

“Don’t worry about it so much, Turpin,” he told her. “You shouldn’t feel bad about Daphne being better than you at chess. She’s been playing since she was two.”

Lisa’s eyes widened, and she turned back to Daphne with an awed expression. “You’ve been playing since you were *two*? That’s incredible!”

Daphne’s cheeks reddened slightly. She patted at her skirt nervously. “My father loves the game, so he wanted me to learn it from a very early age. He used to play with me almost every day.”

“No wonder you’re so good! I was really starting to get a complex about my skills,” Lisa said with a giggle. “I’ve only been playing for a few months, but I’ve been able to beat a lot of the other students in my House!”

Daphne’s eyebrows rose. “A few months? You’re actually quite good, if that’s the case.”

“My mum bought me a set for Christmas, so I’ve been trying it out in my free time.” Lisa’s smile turned apologetic. “I’m sorry for accusing you of cheating. I know you wouldn’t do that. I guess it just feels like you know all of my moves in advance somehow! I can’t get one over you at all.”

Daphne coughed, slightly embarrassed. “After a while, you start recognizing patterns in the way people play. It’s not really that I know what you’re going to do, but beginners don’t really understand the game that well so I can just use some simple strategies to get ahead.”

“Really? Could you teach them to me?”

“Well,” Daphne said slowly, “The ones I was using might be too much right now, but I wouldn’t mind teaching you some better openings to start with. There’s many chess books you might want to check out if you’re serious about the game.”

Lisa nodded. “Thank you, I will!”

The two girls reset the pieces on the board and Daphne began explaining a few of the most common opening strategies, as well as general guidelines to improve Lisa’s gameplay. After about an hour, Lisa left to go hang out with her Ravenclaw Housemates in a different compartment, waving at Daphne happily as she left.

As soon as she was gone, Daphne turned to glare at Harry.

“Why did you tell her that?”

Harry gave her a measured look. He knew exactly why she was upset with him, even if he didn’t agree with her sentiment. Daphne didn’t like sharing her private life with other students, and especially not with those of other Houses. And usually Harry was all on board with that, given that he had a similar personality, but this situation was fairly unique.

Daphne didn’t really have a lot of people who she felt she could connect with in Slytherin. She and Pansy were roommates and got along pretty well, but Daphne was very studious and rather serious

in general, where Pansy was much more vivacious and social, only really doing schoolwork as was necessary. They just didn't have a lot of hobbies or interests in common, so they didn't connect on a deeper level.

As for the other members of their group, it was a bit of a mixed bag. Draco was probably who she treated the most as a friend, but as with Pansy, they didn't really share any common interests. She and Blaise had a bit of a strained relationship for reasons that weren't particularly clear, where they mostly just ignored each other, or else conversed politely if needed. As for Harry, he still hadn't managed to have a single real conversation alone with her. She had a tendency to come across as stiff and disinterested a lot of the time, which Harry took no offense to but also didn't really feel like putting in the effort to get past. He was content with having her as just a friendly acquaintance or an ally. Meanwhile Bulstrode, Nott, Goyle and Crabbe all kind of fit in the same category of being rather dumb, and therefore not particularly compatible with her.

She could usually be found quietly hanging out with Draco's group, or else alone reading. She barely talked to anyone from any of the other Houses, and almost never showed an interest in trying to befriend them.

Until Lisa Turpin.

The Ravenclaw girl was smart, competitive, and hard-working, but she was also very social and could become friends with anyone easily. She and Daphne had been paired for an assignment in Charms, and had since become friendly. Harry had spotted them chatting in the library half a dozen times, which was considerable given Daphne's usual reclusiveness. But friendly didn't exactly mean friends, and it was obvious Daphne was keeping Lisa at arm's length in spite of the other girl's attempts at becoming closer.

Harry wasn't sure why; Daphne clearly liked Lisa a lot, or else she wouldn't have hung out with her at all. The mere fact that Daphne had invited Lisa to play chess in the Slytherin compartment during the train ride spoke volumes, not to mention that Lisa had also accepted. As far as Harry could tell, there was nothing preventing Daphne from opening up to the other girl except for her own stubbornness. It bothered Harry to see Lisa doing her best to engage Daphne, only to have the other girl shut her out as soon as things started getting even slightly personal. If Daphne hadn't clearly liked Lisa, or if Lisa had been bothering her in any way, that would have been completely different. If it had been anyone else, Harry would not have interfered at all.

But Harry was fairly certain that Daphne *did* want to open up to Lisa, but she was just so used to hiding from people that she just couldn't take the first step. And apparently, he'd been right. He'd only needed to make a small comment that Daphne had mentioned to them months ago in passing, and Daphne's own desire to open up did the rest of the work.

So her being upset with him after the fact was rather funny to him, if a bit annoying.

"Because you wanted her to know," Harry replied. "Or else you wouldn't be playing chess with her at all. Don't pretend you don't want to get closer with her, it's obvious you really like her."

Daphne's face went red. "You don't know anything!" she snapped, scowling, and stormed out of the compartment.

Harry stared after her with wide eyes, having not expected such an extreme reaction at all. Daphne was usually very composed, even when upset.

Beside him, Blaise burst out laughing. "You're so oblivious, Merlin," he said, shaking his head.

Harry scowled, feeling embarrassment creep up on him. "I'm right, though." Draco snorted.

"it's not about being right, Harry, it's about being inappropriate."

"How on earth was I inappropriate?" Harry asked, incredulous.

"You can't just expose Daphne like that," Draco explained gently. "She needs to take her time. You know she's very private."

"Yes, of course, but she's been dancing around Turpin for months, it's driving me insane!" He dragged a hand through his hair. "I understand she doesn't like telling people things, but it's not like her knowing chess is a secret. She clearly wants to be Turpin's friend, and I just don't understand why she's being so stubborn and pretending she doesn't."

Draco stared at him for a few moments before turning to Blaise with a sigh. "I see what you mean now."

"Right?" Blaise said, making a gesture of slight exasperation.

Harry frowned. "What are you two talking about?"

"Harry, it's not about Daphne wanting to be friends with Turpin," Draco said slowly, like he was explaining something to a child. Harry scowled at him, annoyed at being treated like that for something he was certain wasn't his fault.

"What do you-"

"She has a *crush* on Turpin," Blaise interjected, leaning back into the couch.

Harry's jaw dropped.

"...oh," he said after a few moments, feeling his blush return ten-fold. "I didn't...realize."

"Clearly," Draco drawled, deeply amused. "It's almost impressive. Pansy's been teasing her about it for months, I can't believe you never noticed."

"It just didn't occur to me," Harry said quietly. "I feel kind of bad now. I didn't mean to set her up like that."

"I'll explain it to her, don't worry. We just need to give her some time to cool down, she's very sensitive about things like this. But Daphne knows you can be really shite at feelings, so she won't hold it against you for too long."

Harry wanted to complain, but he couldn't really refute Draco's accusation. Besides, he appreciated the blond's gesture; Harry wouldn't have really known how to apologize to Daphne without potentially making everything worse.

Suddenly the compartment door opened and Pansy stepped inside, looking faintly bewildered. "Why did I just see Daphne storm down the hall? I thought she was..." She frowned. "Don't tell me one of you called her out on her crush in front of Lisa? You know how sensitive she is about things like that."

Harry buried his face in his hands with a groan.

Blaise smirked, leaning forward to pat at Harry's head with mock pity. "It's alright, darling. You may be rude but you're still pretty."

Harry shot him a glare. "That's rich coming from you. I wouldn't have had to say anything if all of you hadn't made her feel bad about how poorly she was playing."

Blaise brought a hand up to his chest with feigned shock. "Are you saying you think I'm pretty?"

"How is that what you got out of what I said?"

"Hope springs eternal," Draco mused wisely.

Summer break turned out to be about as uneventful as Harry could have wished, for the most part.

He'd booked his stay at the Leaky Cauldron once again, and mostly stayed in his room, studying Runes, meditating, and feeding the bloodwand as much as possible.

The wand still felt like an endless void, and Harry was really starting to wonder how long it would be until he would be able to use it properly. The stick method was working fine for now, but Harry still wanted to see what exactly made this wand so special. In fact, he'd visited Ollivander near the beginning of the break to see what the old wand-maker knew about the bloodwand. The answer, unfortunately, turned out to be 'pretty much nothing'.

For one, Ollivander was actually not the one who had made the wand. It had been given to him many years ago by a travelling merchant, who had bought it from a young shop-owner who had inherited it from his uncle and had no idea what it was. The merchant had brought it to Ollivander for his professional opinion on it, but once Ollivander had told him what he knew, the man had refused to take the wand with him. Blood magic was widely considered to be extremely Dark, even back then, and the merchant had feared that the wand would harm him, in spite of Ollivander's reassurances to the contrary.

So Ollivander had kept the wand in his shop since then, not actually ever expecting to find a wizard that was compatible with it. Then Harry came along, and took not only the bloodwand, but another wand too, Voldemort's brother wand. It was an incredible coincidence as far as Ollivander was concerned, and he knew very little about what it could mean, but he had felt certain that Harry *had* to take both. Upon further questioning, it became clear he hadn't known of the dangers of combining both wands, and hadn't even known that the bloodwand needed to be 'primed' at all. There were so many myths and rumors about bloodwands that actual facts had become buried, and even Ollivander had a hard time telling the two apart in many cases. Harry had left the shop with even more questions than he'd had when he'd arrived.

Draco had sent him an owl to ask Harry if he wanted to hang out with him, Blaise and Pansy on his birthday, as Draco and the others would have to come down to buy their books anyways. Harry readily agreed, and they decided to meet in front of the Leaky Cauldron on the morning of July 31st. It was the first time in his life Harry had ever looked forward to his own birthday.

"Harry!" Draco exclaimed with a smile as he caught sight of the other boy coming out of the Inn. "Happy Birthday!"

Harry's face turned pink as a few other people near the entrance turned to look at him. "Shh, not so loud!"

Behind his son, Lucius nodded in greeting. "Happy Birthday, Mr. Potter. My son insisted we

accompanied you for the day.”

Harry’s blush intensified. “There’s no need for that, Mr. Malfoy! I wouldn’t want to be a bother to you.”

Narcissa’s laughter was soft and refined. “Oh, Harry, you aren’t a bother. Draco talks so much about you we feel as though we’ve known you for years. We’d love to have the chance to spend your birthday with you, if you would let us.”

“Yes, Harry, you’re in the process of being considered for the position of the third adopted child of the Malfoy family,” Pansy interjected with a grin. “Don’t be rude now, let them spoil you for the day.”

Harry sputtered, flustered. “I...uh...what?”

Blaise rolled his eyes with a grin. “Don’t pay any attention to Pansy, she loves to joke about that because we’ve been friends with Draco for so long.”

“How dare you mock my feelings, I-!”

“Alright you two, settle down,” Lucius interrupted them cleanly, but there was a fond undercurrent to his voice that made Harry wonder how correct Pansy’s assertion actually was. The thought sent warmth running through his chest.

“Of course he’ll spend the day with us, that’s why we’re here,” Draco stated assertively. “Come on, Harry, let’s get our school supplies first and then we can just relax for the rest of the day.”

Narcissa tutted at her son with faint disapproval at his commanding attitude, but Harry nodded, happy as always to let Draco take the lead in social situations like this one. “Sure, that sounds good.”

“Let’s start with books first, then?”

The group quickly set out down Diagon Alley, Draco and Pansy updating Harry on all they’d done during the break. Upon reaching Flourish and Blotts, Harry remembered that he’d wanted to buy a book on Nutrition Potions, and he split off from the group with a quick excuse. The Medicinal Potions section was near the back of the store, hidden behind a much larger section on Charms, which Harry noted he might also want to investigate at some point. He started perusing the selection, trying to find a book that specifically talked about concentrated nutrient potions as well as general supplements. He had found one that sounded promising and was looking it over when he was startled by a loud gasp behind him.

“You’re the Boy-Who-Lived!”

Harry spun around at the words, meeting the eyes of a small freckled girl, whose face was as flaming red as her hair.

He felt a bit out of his depth in this kind of situation. While everyone in Hogwarts was aware that he was the Boy-Who-Lived, they didn’t really acknowledge it anymore, except for sometimes making fun of him. There was very little hero-worship, which Harry was more than okay with, thanks to the fact that he got Sorted into Slytherin and was best friends with Draco and his crew. Apparently, nothing took the wind out of everyone’s ‘Savior’ sails like seeing him cavorting with the enemy.

Even while he’d been walking around Diagon Alley, no one really dared approach him. Whether it

was because his fame was too intimidating, or because of Lucius's fantastic ability to make other people feel rude just for looking at him, he was grateful for it either way. He'd gotten a few confused looks, even one or two frowns, but that was about it.

So when this girl approached him out of nowhere, peering up at him with undisguised awe in her eyes, Harry had no idea how to deal with it.

"Um, hello?" he said when she didn't continue. He attempted a small smile, and hoped it didn't look as forced as it felt. "That's...me. I guess." He struggled for a moment with what to say. "Uh, what's your name?"

She visibly pulled herself back together, giving him a tiny, nervous smile. "Hi. Um. Hi. My name is Ginny. Ginnevra Weasley. But just Ginny, actually." She cringed, as if at her own awkwardness.

"Oh!" Harry exclaimed, feeling like he should have figured it out by the hair alone. That particular bright shade was pretty rare, after all. "Is Ron Weasley your brother, then?"

She nodded shyly, and they were once again silent.

Harry had never before felt this incapable of carrying on a conversation. To be fair, Ginny wasn't really helping. But she had approached him first, so he felt like he had to make an effort to be friendly, if only to not come across as rude for no reason. "So, if you don't mind me asking, what are you doing in Diagon Alley?"

She brightened, her shyness suddenly evaporating with her excitement. "I'm here with my family, I just got my books for Hogwarts!" She lifted the cauldron on her arm, where a variety of books were lying. "I finally get to go this year, I'm really excited!"

Harry smiled back. Finally a topic he could work with. "That's great. It's really fun there, I've only been a year but I'm sure you'll really like it. What House do you think you'll be in?" He thanked past-Draco for giving him conversational points he never thought he'd use.

"My whole family has been in Gryffindor, so that's where I'll be in too!"

Harry quirked an eyebrow at her, amused at her certainty. The hat didn't care about family ancestry at all, as far as Harry could tell. He assumed the main reason it put so many people from the same family in the same house was because children had a tendency to be like their parents, especially at the age of eleven. But the actual biological ties meant nothing.

"That doesn't mean you'll definitely be in Gryffindor, you know," he refuted gently. He didn't want to crush her dreams or anything like that, but just in case the Sorting Hat *didn't* place her in Gryffindor he wanted her to at least have some warning that it could happen in the first place. "Take me for example; my parents were in Gryffindor, but I'm in Slytherin."

Her eyes widened, and Harry abruptly realized she might not have known that fact at all, and wondered if he had inadvertently just crushed her dreams about her 'Savior' instead. It would be a bit surprising; the Daily Prophet had made a huge fuss about it at the time, and newspapers everywhere talked about it for weeks.

But after a moment she nodded. "That's true. I guess I just always assumed..." she bit her lip nervously for a moment, before her eyes widened once again and she hurried to explain. "Not that being in any other House would be bad! If I wasn't in Gryffindor I'm sure it would be fine too. Even Slytherin would be okay, since you're in it."

"Me?" What did Harry being in Slytherin have to do with anything?

She looked surprised by his question. "Well, you're the Boy-Who-Lived! You defeated the Dark Lord, so if you're in Slytherin that means that at least one of you isn't a bad person."

Right. She was a 'fan'.

Harry had to contain the urge to sigh. He probably should have seen it coming, seeing that she was part of a family who was well known for being extremely Light. But when she hadn't really reacted badly to him being in Slytherin he'd just kind of assumed she had somehow avoided the common prejudice. It was also kind of weird that she was just saying this to Harry's face, like she didn't even realize she was being rude. Which, to be fair, maybe she didn't. Maybe she thought Harry, as the Boy-Who-Lived, Defeater of Voldemort, was obviously in Slytherin against his own will, and would agree with her sentiment. She probably had no idea what Slytherins were even like outside of the comic-book villains the Light portrayed them as.

"Ginny, have you ever talked to a Slytherin before?"

She tilted her head. "No, not really."

As he'd expected. "Then maybe you should consider not going around saying hurtful things about them for no reason," he said. "That's a pretty awful thing to say at all, much less about an entire group of people who you've never met and don't really know anything about. Slytherins are just people, no one deserves to be insulted just for existing."

She looked fairly taken aback by his words. She'd probably never had someone who would push back when she said something like that. In fact, Harry would bet pretty much everyone she talked to regularly would have actively encouraged it, and he wondered if she would just get angry with him, feeling attacked even though she'd done the attacking first. It was a common enough response.

But she surprised him by merely frowning and crossing her arms defensively. "Well, my dad's met a lot of Slytherins so he knows a lot about them. He told me they're bad people because they're always greedy and sneaky, and they always mess with him at work. I'm not just being mean for no reason, Slytherins are known for being bad people. They're put in that House for a reason."

She was trying to *reason* with him. Even if she was clearly wrong, the fact that she had actual claims and was attempting to cite sources was completely unexpected. Harry had to take a moment to consider that maybe *he* was being prejudiced against her too; just because she disliked Slytherins didn't mean she was an irrational person. If she'd been told her entire life that Slytherins were bad by people she trusted, it was perfectly reasonable for her to believe they were telling the truth, especially given that she'd never met Slytherins herself. It was one thing for Harry to be annoyed with Hogwarts students who held this kind of prejudice, given they were around Slytherins for most of the year, but Ginny had no personal experience with them, so she obviously had to rely on the people around her for her judgments. Again, perfectly reasonable. Wrong, of course, but reasonable.

All of Harry's initial annoyance was instantly washed away at the thought, but he did still want to correct her misconceptions. As the Boy-Who-Lived, he figured it would be pretty easy to gain her trust, even as a Slytherin.

"Ginny, do you know what being a Slytherin is *actually* about?"

"What do you mean?"

"What the House represents. Like, Gryffindors are brave and chivalrous, Slytherins are..."

Ginny looked thoughtful for a moment. "Aren't they...trying to get money and power? And being sneaky?"

Harry snorted. "You *really* think Hogwarts created a House specifically for bad, sneaky people who wanted money and power? What kind of school would that be?"

She turned red, clearly realizing her answer made no sense. "No! But...isn't it..." she paused, trying to think. "It's something like that! I'm not just making this up."

"Ambition? Cunning?"

"Yes! Isn't ambition about wanting power and money?"

"Not at all, actually," he said, trying to hide his amusement. "Ambition only has to do with wanting something really badly, and what that something is varies from person to person. Someone's greatest desire might be to open up a nice flower shop, and as long as they *really* want it, then that's their ambition."

"Oh," she said with a little twist of her head. "Really?"

"Yep. You can look it up in a dictionary, if you don't believe me."

She looked at him with vague suspicion, but then she nodded. "Okay. But what about cunning, then? I *know* that means being good at lying." Harry had to contain his amusement at her tone, like she thought he was going to call her out again. There was something about her that just struck Harry as funny - in a good way - but he couldn't quite tell what. Maybe it was just how earnest she seemed.

"You're not entirely right, but it's close enough. Even so, lying isn't always a bad thing. Sometimes it's important to hide something to protect it, or to protect yourself. You can't always just go around telling people the truth."

She narrowed her eyes. "I think you can," she said, almost like she was testing him. "If you're a good person, you should never have to lie to others."

Harry raised an eyebrow. That was...novel? It gave him fairly strong insight into her character, at any rate. "Surely you've hidden things from your parents at some point?" he asked. "You're not going to just tell me you've never lied in your life."

Her cheeks went pink. "That's different, that doesn't count," she said. "I'm not hurting anyone by lying to my mom about not doing chores."

Harry had wondered if she would be hypocritical and lie to hide her faults and support her argument, but it seemed she really was just a very honest person. He thought back to the way Ron had easily confessed about Nott; maybe it was a Weasley thing.

"What if you had to lie to keep your family safe, then? What if something bad was going to happen, and the only way for you to keep yourself out of danger and help others was to lie about it?"

She watched him carefully, like she thought she was being tricked into agreeing with him but not managing to find anything wrong with his argument. "I guess...in that case it would be alright."

So even when suspicious, she really *was* fairly rational. Harry found himself smiling genuinely. "Slytherins will always place their families and their own well-being above any sense of honor.

You may not agree with that, but surely you can't think that makes them bad people," he said, trying to come across as earnestly as possible. He really *wasn't* trying to trick her.

Ginny hesitated for a moment but then nodded firmly, relaxing as she apparently decided he could be trusted. "No, that's fair," she said. "I would also lie to save my family, if it came down to it. It's just, I don't know, being *good* at lying just doesn't...sound like a good thing?"

So that was her hang up; it was a fair point, really.

"Well, as it turns out, being cunning isn't just about being good at lying. It's also about being resourceful and creative, finding ways to solve problems that aren't necessarily the 'right' way, but maybe it's the only way that keeps you safe. It's also about deception, and deception can be about just...telling people only certain things, or phrasing it in a way that makes it sound better. It doesn't have to be about lying directly."

Ginny peered at him with narrowed eyes, but she looked mostly amused now, like she'd figured him out. "Like you're doing right now to make it sound better?"

Harry's eyes widened, but then he started laughing. "You got me," he said, internally quite surprised she'd realized it. She was more perceptive than he'd given her credit for. "Don't get me wrong, I do agree that being cunning isn't necessarily the best trait to have in general," he said, "but it's all about how and when you use it. If you lie to hurt others then of course that's bad, but if you lie to help them, then what's the big issue?"

"It's just...wouldn't it still be better to tell the truth?" Ginny asked, somewhat stubbornly. "If we all start lying to each other, aren't we just making things worse? Even if we think we're helping?"

Harry didn't think this was an issue she would budge on, but he also didn't really want her to budge on it. He even agreed with her, ideally. That being said, he did want to make sure she understood that just because ideally something was correct, that didn't mean it was correct in reality.

"Ginny, you sound like you're a pretty sincere person," Harry said with a smile. "And, honestly? If more people were like you, the world would probably be a better place. But lying isn't the problem. The problem is people wanting to do bad things, and using lying as a way to get there. And in many cases, the only way to fight fire is with fire, and although I agree that it would be better if lying was never necessary, in tough situations sometimes you just have to decide what you care about more; your integrity or helping people."

Ginny sighed. "I guess you're right. It's just..ugh." She pouted. "I don't like having to figure out what people are keeping from me. If someone has a problem, I'd much rather they just say it to my face. And so many people lie about random things all the time, just because they want to fit in, or seem cool. I'm not saying people should tell the truth *all* the time, but I wish we were all just more honest in general."

Harry nodded. "I agree with that completely." How much more simple life would be.

She grinned. "You're not a very good Slytherin, huh?"

"Woah, rude," he said, pretending to feel insulted, and she giggled in response. He was glad she was feeling comfortable enough to joke with him now, he didn't really enjoy having awkward arguments. "Plenty of Slytherins would agree with you, actually. We aren't all just one blob, just like I'm sure your family aren't all the same person even if you're all Gryffindors."

Her eyes widened in realization, and he wondered vaguely if she *had* just thought all Slytherins

were one blob. He supposed that that was what happened when you viewed a group of people as all being of uniform personalities, and the wide-spread prejudice against Slytherins certainly couldn't have helped.

"Huh," she said, a little faintly. "Yeah, my brothers are all...definitely *very* different. I guess I never really thought about it, but there must be a lot of Slytherins that are brave, or hard-working, or like reading, right? The Houses all share some things, but of course no one is just...one type of anything. Like you said, it's all just people."

Harry blinked, fairly impressed at her quick conclusion. That thought was one that he'd seen much older Hogwarts students still struggling with, even after being in Hogwarts for many years, and Ginny had just gotten it immediately. "Absolutely," he replied. "Slytherins are really good friends to have, for one. Everyone kind of assumes they back-stab one another, but that couldn't be further from the truth. If you help a Slytherin, they'll always make sure to pay you back, and as long as you are loyal to them, they'll remain loyal to you."

She gave him a considering look. "You really *do* like your House, don't you?" she asked softly.

"Yes," he answered firmly. "So I really don't like it when people just say bad things about us, especially for no reason."

Her cheeks went red. "I'm sorry," she said. "That was really thoughtless of me to say, especially to someone who is in Slytherin. I *was* being mean, I'm sorry."

"I accept your apology," he said with a small wave. He was actually quite enjoying talking to her, so he wasn't going to hold her initial mistake against her. "Don't worry too much about it. If anything, I'm glad you listened to me. A lot of people wouldn't have cared to even think about why they were wrong."

She looked fairly surprised by his words. "What do you mean? Why not?"

Harry shrugged. "People like to think that they're right, especially when it comes things like 'good' or 'bad'. I'd bet your Dad wouldn't have listened."

"I..." she said, frowning. Clearly she realized he had a point. "...I mean, maybe if I talked to him about it?"

Harry smiled faintly. "I don't think that would work. He'll think the evil Slytherins have corrupted you or something like that. His innocent little daughter, confused about the ways of the world."

"Come on!" she complained with a pout. "I'm trying to help!"

"Help? With what?" he asked with a grin, amused at her tiny tantrum. She really was funny, he wasn't sure why he found her so funny.

"I just..." she huffed. "I don't know. Understanding? I don't like thinking that my Dad is just being mean. There must be a reason he's so upset about them, right?"

Of course she didn't want to believe her Dad was just being a jerk, that was totally reasonable. And to be completely fair, Harry had no knowledge of their circumstances either; maybe Weasley Sr. had been relentlessly bullied by Slytherins his entire Hogwarts and work career so his opinions of them were honestly just terrible. But even then, Harry would never condone overgeneralizing that to the entire House for the rest of time. If Ginny was to dislike Slytherins, he wanted her to come about it honestly.

“Maybe he’s angry with one person who is a Slytherin, and there’s nothing wrong with that. That one person might be a real arse,” Harry said. “It might even be a group of people who are all terrible. But that doesn’t mean he should just call *all* Slytherins who’ve ever existed bad. Blaming an entire group for the actions of one small part of it only promotes injustice and unfairness, and holding it against them for generations just sounds a bit too extreme for me.”

Ginny snorted. “You’re right, he’s being kind of ridiculous,” she said, then nodded. “I’ll try talking to him. I don’t know if he’ll listen to me, but it can’t be bad to try, right?”

“If you really want to,” he said with an overly casual shrug. “Don’t come crying to me when your parents disown you.”

She gasped in mock anger. “They would never!”

“You know what you should do instead?” His expression turned thoughtful. “Make friends with Slytherins. Make friends in all the Houses. Then tell your parents all about how you want to promote Inter-House unity, and equality, and chivalry, and all that other goody-two-shoes stuff Gryffindors love. Then they’ll listen to you.”

She blinked at him, then smiled knowingly. “This is you being ‘cunning’ again, isn’t it?”

Harry sputtered, not expecting to just get called out like that by her even though in hindsight he definitely should have. “There’s no lying involved!”

She giggled, putting up two fingers to simulate quotation marks. “‘Inter-House unity’?”

“Do you *not* want to promote peace and love between all the Houses?” he gasped. “Are you planning to sow discord among the students of Hogwarts?”

“No!”

“Then you’re not lying!”

“Harry, there you are! I’m ready to go, if you are.”

Blaise’s voice came from behind him, and Harry turned to him with a smile. “Ah, sorry Blaise, I got distracted talking with Ginny, here.”

“Who?” Blaise said, coming up next to him with a raised eyebrow.

“Ginny Weasley. She’s going to Hogwarts this year, so we were just talking a bit. Ginny, this is my friend, Blaise Zabini. He’s also in Slytherin,” he said, turning back to look at her. He worried for a moment that she would revert back to being prejudiced in the face of another Slytherin, but looking at her face, he knew he needn’t have bothered.

Her complexion was a bright, vivid red, even more than it had been when she’d first approached Harry, which he hadn’t realized was possible. He followed her wide, awestruck eyes, which were glued to Blaise’s, and felt his amusement soar.

The effect the grey-eyed boy had on others was truly incredible.

“Hello,” Blaise said cordially, if a bit stiffly.

“H..h...hello...um...hi,” stammered Ginny, her voice squeaky. She clutched her cauldron tightly against her front.

It was taking all of Harry's self control to not to burst out laughing. From the annoyed look Blaise was giving him, he wasn't doing a great job of hiding it. As long as Ginny didn't notice Harry didn't really care.

"I apologize, but we're going to be late if Harry here doesn't get his books. Please excuse us," Blaise said, placing a hand on Harry's shoulder and gripping tightly.

"Oh, yes of course, I'm sorry! I'll leave! Bye Harry, I'll see you around! B..bye, bye Zabini!"

"No need to leave, we can just..." Harry began to say, but Ginny had already turned away and was heading for the door, running into one of the book shelves in her haste and causing a few books to fall to the floor. She hurriedly bent down to put them back in place.

"Interesting," Blaise said dryly, clearly deeply unimpressed.

"She was actually quite nice to talk to until you showed up," Harry said, finally letting his amusement show through to Blaise with a mocking smile. Blaise let out an irritated huff, giving him a half-hearted glare in return.

"Lucky me."

"Ah!"

Harry and Blaise both turned back to Ginny at the sound of her yelp. She had fallen on the floor, her cauldron upturned and her books everywhere. In front of her stood Lucius, looking slightly stunned for a split second before his usual expression of politeness was back in place.

"Be careful of where you're going, young lady," he said, with a slight amount of frostiness in his tone, but he quickly leaned over to pick up the books Ginny had dropped. "Don't just go running around without looking, you'll get hurt."

Ginny was speechless for a few seconds, before suddenly regaining her bearings and shooting forward to pick up her books as well. "Oh Merlin, I'm so sorry! I was so distracted, I'm really sorry!"

Harry had to stop himself from laughing at how embarrassed she looked. He turned to start walking in their direction, to ask her if she was alright, when he suddenly noticed something strange happening to Lucius' magic.

It went oddly still for an instant, and then abruptly it seemed to fragment, like a pane of glass being struck with a rock. Each shard had a black edge to it, an ominous dark shadow at the periphery of each section that seemed deeply rooted within his core.

And as Lucius reached over to place the books he'd grabbed into Ginny's cauldron, from within the folds of his cloak, he suddenly pulled out a small object and dropped it noiselessly among the books scattered at his feet. The dark edge around his magic seemed to flow from this object, swallowing it within a whirlpool of black, and as it fell the shadow fell with it, raining around Lucius like waterfalls of ink. But within moments it had all disappeared, camouflaged among the other items on the floor like it had always been there.

Harry stared at where it had fallen, stunned at what he'd just seen, and before he could react Ginny had picked up the pile of books it had been in and stuffed them into her cauldron. She stood hurriedly, bowing to Lucius with her face still a bright red, blurted out another apology, and ran out of the bookstore, nearly instantly becoming lost in the throng of people outside.

“Children, always rushing about,” Lucius murmured, not unkindly, brushing off his robes as he straightened and seemingly not noticing anything was amiss. His magic, too, now looked completely normal, poised and lethal-looking as ever. The fragmentation was missing, his magic one seamless whole, and the dark shadow had been entirely drained when he’d dropped the object. It was as if nothing had happened.

Harry swallowed a lump in his throat.

That object, whatever it had been, had been Dark. No, not just Dark; the single Darkest magic Harry had ever seen, so dense it felt like it was swallowing the object itself like molasses. It was so dark, it had even prevented Harry from being able to see what the object *was*, and that had never happened before. Magic was usually more like an extremely light haze around whatever it occupied, and even the strongest magic never overpowered the object’s own physical appearance. But this thing, whatever it had been, had been cloaked by its magic entirely. It had purposefully been hiding.

And Harry didn’t know what to do.

The strangest part of all of this to Harry was what had happened to Lucius, in that moment. Magic breaking apart like that, Harry had *never* seen that. It looked awful, unnatural, painful, Harry would have assumed something like that would kill anyone.

But Lucius genuinely seemed to have no idea it had happened.

Harry wanted to ask him about it, but what on earth could he say? *Mr. Malfoy, did you by any chance notice that you got possessed by that incredibly Dark magical object you were carrying around a few seconds ago? How do I know this? Well, you see, I can see magic! So, yes about that obviously highly illegal and dangerous Dark object you were carrying, care to share the details?*

He couldn’t imagine that conversation going over well, especially not with someone like Lucius, who was well known for taking extreme measures to keep his family safe. It didn’t matter that Harry was friends with his son; Harry was a twelve-year-old Light wizard who’d had his family killed by the same Dark Lord who had been Lucius’ master. If Lucius decided Harry was a threat to his family’s well-being...

Let’s just say, Harry didn’t really want to bring this up with Lucius at all.

The other option was running after Ginny, but even if Harry had managed to stop her, he wasn’t sure what he would have done. He couldn’t just steal the object with his magic; all he knew was that it was very Dark, and that wasn’t enough for *Volito* to work. He needed to know *some* identifying characteristic of whatever object he was trying to manipulate, or his magic would just be confused. He also couldn’t just ask Ginny about it directly. How would he have explained that he’d seen her take a small object that she hadn’t noticed at all, even though he had been on the other side of the store? And what if she recognized it was a Dark object? He had no idea what it was, it could be incriminating at a glance. And what if someone else saw it too, and then Harry had to explain that no, it wasn’t his, it was Lucius Malfoy’s extremely Dark, obviously highly illegal magical object? Running after Ginny might help her, but it would endanger both Harry and the entire Malfoy family tremendously.

And between risking Ginny’s safety and that of the Malfoys, Harry would chose to keep the Malfoys safe in an instant. It wasn’t ideal, but nothing about this situation was.

So he decided to wait and hope that Ginny brought the object to Hogwarts, and deal with it there. He was fully certain he’d be able to recognize it in any situation, due to its unique magic. He could

only hope that the object wasn't so dangerous that being near Ginny for a month would affect her too severely.

Who knew, maybe it would just turn out to be a perfectly harmless decorative pin, that was extremely Dark for...sentimental reasons? And the fragmenting magic was just...for fun?

“Come on, Harry, we’re wasting time! Everyone else is ready to go.”

“Sorry, yeah, let’s hurry,” Harry said, shaking his head and deciding not to worry about something he couldn’t really do anything about for now. He sent a mental apology to Ginny and wondered if she would still be fine by the time he saw her again. He could only hope his decision to keep this all to himself for now was the right one.

Chapter End Notes

sketch: [Lucius and the Dark Object](#)

I hope you all enjoyed Harry's meeting with Ginny! The Weasley family catches a lot of flack in Dark!Harry stories, especially Ron and Ginny, but I want to treat them properly.

I also always felt that Lucius completely willingly giving the diary to Ginny was just...not very cash money of him. Idk it just seemed unnecessarily dickish to target a child like that. Not this Lucius, no siree.

Thank you so much for all of your support with this story, I love reading all of your thoughts and opinions and predictions <3<3

Thank you for reading <3

Temporo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Coming back to Hogwarts was somehow both more and less exciting than Harry had expected it to be, when compared to his first encounter with the castle. It wasn't as new, but now that Harry knew what was in store, there was no trepidation involved and he could enjoy the welcoming sight of its stone turrets and majestic presence without a shred of nervousness. He hadn't seen his friends since his birthday, so that was also something Harry had been looking forward to. He hadn't expected it, but he'd actually started missing being around them near the end of the break.

They had spent the first hour of the train ride catching up, and the rest playing different versions of exploding snap and a card game Pansy had picked up when she'd traveled to France with her family. Lisa Turpin had shown up halfway through and stayed for a few rounds, before leaving to meet other friends. Pansy smiled at Daphne teasingly after Lisa left, and Daphne turned bright red and shot her a withering glare. Harry did not dare to make any comments; he and Daphne had made up, but he still felt bad about his mistake last time and didn't want to do anything that might hurt their current truce.

The Welcoming Feast was much less stressful as a second year as well, and Harry enjoyed getting to see the first years get Sorted without having to be a part of the process himself. When Ginny was called up, and was Sorted into Gryffindor as she'd predicted, Harry made sure to clap loudly and smile encouragingly. She caught his eye for a moment and gave him a weak smile in return before walking over to her House.

He'd half-forgotten about Ginny and the Dark Object, since he hadn't been able to do anything about it during the Summer, and Harry's eyes narrowed as he observed Ginny carefully. He couldn't see any traces of Dark magic on her, but that didn't mean she hadn't brought the Dark Object to Hogwarts with her. If she had it would probably be in her trunk anyways, which would have been taken to her Dorms automatically. From what Harry could see at a distance, she did look slightly more tired than she had been in Diagon Alley, but it wasn't anything particularly drastic and nothing that couldn't easily be attributed to the long train ride here. He'd have to wait and see to make any further judgments. At least she'd made it fine this far, Harry thought with relief, glad he hadn't made a horrible mistake in letting her keep the object this long.

Who knew, maybe it really *had* been completely harmless, and Harry had had no reason to worry about her all along.

As the weeks went on and classes started to pick up, Harry started to plan how he was going to talk to Snape about his Magic. It was not that he wasn't looking forward to opening up to the Potion's Master, but the chance that Snape would react badly to it all scared him; once the secret was out, he couldn't take it back. But then again, Snape already knew half of it, what was a little more? Besides, Blaise had taken it really well, and hopefully Snape would too.

Once his mind was made up, he decided to visit Snape's office after his classes on Thursday, since he knew the Professor was usually there at that time. It had been a common meeting time for them

last year, and one Harry had gotten fairly used to. He hoped the sense of normalcy would help calm him down, but he could feel his nerves start to act up as he approached the Potion Master's office. Before he could change his mind, he knocked on the door.

"Come in," Snape's voice rang out, and Harry entered the room, making sure to close the door behind him.

"Sir? Do you have some time?" he asked nervously, unable to resist the urge to fidget.

Snape regarded him curiously, looking up from where he'd been grading papers on his desk. "Is anything wrong, Mr. Potter?"

"Not exactly? I wanted to...if you'd be okay with it..." He swallowed. "Maybe we could...I could tell you...talk about..." Why was it so hard to just say it?

Snape frowned, standing up from his desk. "Come sit down, Potter. You aren't making any sense. I'll make us some tea to help your nerves," he said, not unkindly, clearly realizing Harry would need some help to communicate why he was even there.

Harry released a deep sigh, moving over to sit in the couch near the center of the room, where he and Snape often had their discussions.

After a few minutes, Snape came back and put a mug in front of Harry before sitting down on the seat opposite him. "Now, tell me."

"I wanted to tell you about my magic." Harry blurted out quickly.

Snape blinked, clearly not having expected that answer. He placed his mug back on the table from where he'd been about to take a sip and met Harry's eyes with a serious look. "Harry, I don't want you to feel like you need to tell me anything. I would like to know more, yes, but mostly because I fear for your safety and well-being. Magic can be dangerous, especially powerful magic like the one you displayed, and I only want to be sure that you aren't a danger to those around you, or yourself."

Harry swallowed. It was strange to feel Snape's concern so clearly. Even if his tone was somewhat callous, it was clear he was deeply worried about Harry.

"No, I...I want to tell you. I trust you. I want you to know," he managed to say after a few seconds, growing more confident with each word. "I trust you."

Snape's face was unreadable for a moment, before his features abruptly softened. "I appreciate that, Mr. Potter," he said gently, and Harry had the sudden impression that Snape had not heard those words in a long time. The thought made his heart clench, and strengthened Harry's resolve.

And with that, Harry began talking. About the Dursleys, about Sandy, about the library. About discovering Latin, and then discovering magic, and then re-discovering magic when he'd gotten his letter. About reaching the Wizarding World and thinking that maybe he wasn't alone, and then realizing just how alone he really was.

He explained as best he could the general way his magic worked, how the Latin could guide his intentions but how the actual mechanisms of it had much more to do with his control over his power and his understanding of the underlying physics and chemistry involved. It was hard to explain the science behind his magic properly when Snape had at best an elementary understanding of the subject of a whole, but the Potions Professor was very intelligent and knew a lot about Herbology and Potions, which had many concepts similar to Biology and Chemistry, so

he could quickly grasp concepts even if he didn't know the specifics.

Then, to more easily display how his magic worked in practice, Harry showed Snape *Illuminare*, *Ignis* and *Volito*, and how he could control them through allowing a certain amount of magic into the spell, or cutting off the supply when he wanted to end it. He twirled his *Illuminare* around his arm, like he had for Blaise, letting it go as far as he could away from him and then come back, almost like a yo-yo. He also showed him how he could cast certain specific spells wordlessly, although he made sure to clarify that that skill was very hard to learn and execute properly. Snape watched it all with an inscrutable expression on his face, but his magic kept giving strange little jerks every time Harry did something particularly surprising, and Harry couldn't tell if that was a good sign or not. Snape's magic was much harder to read than Blaise's was.

By the time he was finished explaining everything, a few hours had gone by.

"Thank you for telling me all this. I know it must be hard for you," Snape replied when Harry finally announced he had nothing else to say. Harry nodded at him in acknowledgement, sighing tiredly. He hadn't realized how much talking through all this would take out of him.

"You're the first person who knows about my past."

Snape peered at him with considering gaze, then he gestured to Harry's teacup. "Let me make you a new one."

"Oh, sure. Thank you," Harry said as he passed it over, a bit startled at the change in topic. He hadn't even realized he'd drank all his tea, so caught up was he in his story.

Snape was gone for about half a minute, then came back with the two mugs steaming. Harry took his back and then took a small sip. It burned his tongue slightly, but he didn't mind it at all.

"Does anyone else know about your magic?" Snape asked after a few seconds.

"Yes," Harry answered, concerned by Snape's tone. "I accidentally cast a spell wandlessly and wordlessly in front of Blaise, so I had to explain it to him. He promised to keep it secret, and I trust him."

Snape was silent, then he nodded slightly. "I need to tell you something important. Something which may be vital for you to know in the future." he said after a moment.

Harry quirked a brow. "What do you mean?"

Snape reached over to place his cup on the table, carefully interlacing his fingers on his lap. "There exists a spell," he began slowly, cautiously, "that allows a wizard to read someone's mind."

At his words, Harry's blood went cold. "What?" The Sorting Hat was one thing, but the idea that anyone could invade his mind, his thoughts, his memories, and Harry wouldn't be able to stop it...

Snape's mouth twisted. "Most people don't know how to cast it, and its use is generally frowned upon for obvious reasons. However, given your incredibly unique magical abilities, letting you run around without any protections on your mind would be remiss of me, in the off chance that you do encounter someone who would use this spell on you. There are many people who would make your life...*unpleasant* if they knew what you can do. They would try to recruit you, and if you refused, they would label you a threat. They could make your life *very* difficult." He pinned Harry down with a serious gaze. "I did not realize the true extent of your powers, or I would have told you this much sooner. While I am glad that you feel you can trust me, and your friends, it would be best that you keep your abilities to yourself until you are certain you can keep yourself safe."

Harry swallowed thickly. He didn't even know the half of it. "Yes, sir."

"As for Mr. Zabini...you said he's only seen one spell?"

"Two, technically. But I was holding a wand both times, so I *could* say I just faked it, and that Blaise just fell for a trick," Harry replied, understanding immediately what Snape was suggesting. "At most it could be proven that I can do something like 'Lumos' wordlessly but that's just uncommon, not really particularly impressive or notable."

Snape nodded. "Keep it that way. Unless Zabini has his own mind protections he can easily become a liability, but with his current knowledge I don't think you have too much to worry about. You, on the other hand, are an exceptional child and I want to make sure you are safe, so you must learn how to protect your mind as quickly as possible."

Harry felt himself relax slightly at Snape's reassurance, but it was nowhere near enough to set him completely at ease. To be completely honest, he wasn't sure how he could ever be completely at ease again knowing a spell like that existed. "So I *can* protect myself."

"Yes," Snape assured him. "You most definitely can. However, to do so requires you to have excellent control over your magic and your mind, and is a process that takes time and dedication."

"I can do it," Harry said. Snape snorted.

"I'm aware. I was trying to explain what this entails. It's not usually taught to children, for a variety of reasons, but I do not expect you will have too much trouble. It would not be bad for Mr. Zabini to learn this in the long run either, but for now, limit what he knows and make sure he doesn't tell anyone. In the meanwhile, it is important that you know that the spell requires eye contact, so if you or he ever suspect someone is trying to read your minds simply don't look them in the eyes. It is not entirely fool-proof, but it is better than nothing."

"I'll talk to him about it," Harry assured him. "So, how do I start?"

"There are a few ways," Snape said. "There are a few books I will have you read, to give you an idea of what exactly you are going up against, and help you in your own defense. Everyone has a unique way of protecting their mind, so the more choices you have, the better. There is a lot of theory behind a solid mental defense, and the more you understand the mind's structure, the more capable you will be of creating something that is well suited to your natural state."

"My defense should be something that I tailor to myself, then?"

"Absolutely. The more compatible you are with it the better it will serve you in the future." Snape took a sip from his tea. "The second thing, which I will work with you on, is controlling your thoughts and emotions so that an invader will only see what you want them to see. If someone invades your mind, and finds it empty, then they will know you are hiding from them. But if you learn how to show them specific memories and thoughts, they will not realize anything is amiss."

"Makes sense," Harry nodded, considering. "How do I know what will work for me?"

Snape gave him a level look. "Unfortunately, the best and fastest way is for me to enter your mind, and assess your natural state for you. Depending on what I find, we will have to work in different ways." He frowned slightly. "This does mean that there is the possibility that I will run into memories you do not want me to see, as you do not have control over your mind yet. I will do my best to avoid actually looking at any of them, but it may be impossible if I am to analyse your natural state correctly."

Harry blinked. He hadn't realized he would have to give Snape full access to all he knew. He'd shared a lot of his past with his Professor, but there were definitely many things he had not told him about, and many things he would like to keep to himself. Trusting someone was different from having them know *everything* about Harry.

"is there no other way?" he asked after a while.

Snape hummed thoughtfully. "None quite as efficient and accurate, but there is a method that allows me to only see your memories as blank canvases when I enter your mind. But it would require me to brew a potion for a few months and, more importantly, it might affect your mind and memories."

Harry shook his head. He was willing to wait, but he was not willing to have a potion potentially mess up his brain. "No, thank you. I'd rather do it without the potion."

Snape nodded. "Very well, then. I, of course, promise to keep anything I find secret." He stood. "I will be back with the first few books you need to read. Come back to me when you've read all of them, and we'll go from there. When I think you are ready I will perform the examination of your mind and you can start practicing in earnest."

He left the room, and was back within a few minutes, carrying three books. Harry felt somewhat surprised.

"That's all?"

Snape gave him an amused look. "For now. If you want to read more on your own, there are a few books on general mind magic in the library, but none of the ones available to students your age go into any detail."

Harry's eyes narrowed. "There's books about this in the Restricted Section, aren't there?"

Snape nodded. "Unfortunately, as much as I know you would love to be able to explore it, I cannot give you access to that section until your Fourth Year. It is a general Hogwarts policy to prevent students from putting themselves in danger before they can handle it. Even though I do believe you would be fine, I cannot justify the exception to the Headmaster without revealing your magic, which I assume you would prefer I didn't do?"

"Yes, I definitely want as few people knowing about my magic as possible," Harry nodded. Right now Dumbledore thought Harry was just a regular student who just happened to get unlucky a few times, and Harry intended to keep it that way for as long as possible.

Snape nodded. "Mind magic is not as simple as many people think it is. These books might not seem like much, but you must make sure to read them carefully and understand them well. As you go through them, do your best to practice meditating and clearing out your mind. Control of your mind is crucial when building your foundation, and a solid foundation is crucial to having a strong defense. It will allow you build a stable, long lasting mental fortress in the future."

Harry nodded, making sure to remember everything Snape was telling him. "I will, thank you sir," he said, taking the books and placing them carefully in his bag. He then stood, walking towards the door. "I'll come back when I've read these, then."

"Not longer than a month, I expect?"

Harry opened the door and turned to Snape with a smile. "See you in a week!" And then he was gone.

Snape snorted. "Arrogant as always," he murmured, taking another sip of his tea.

"Come on, Ginny, you haven't hung out with us all week!"

"Sorry, I'm just feeling really sick," Ginny said, with a small cough. "I think I'll go back to my room and lay down."

Ginny's friend, 1st year Hufflepuff Charlotte Summerby, frowned at her worriedly. "You should probably go to the Infirmary. You didn't go to class earlier either, so--"

"No, it's nothing to worry about, really!" Ginny hurried to reassure her. Her laugh sounded off. "I think it's just the flu going around, I've always been bad with colds. I'll be better with some rest."

"Well, if you're sure," Charlotte responded, and then left.

Ginny sighed, bringing out an object from her bag. It was a small black book, and she clutched it close to her chest, as if taking strength from it.

"Oh, Tom, why do I feel so poorly lately? Is it really just a bad cold...?"

A small sound to her left made her jump, and she hurriedly stuffed the book back into her bag before turning in the direction of the disturbance.

"Who's there!"

The hallway was empty.

She let out a deep breath. "Calm down, Ginny. There's paintings and ghosts and all kinds of things at Hogwarts, it could be anything." She patted her cheeks. "I'm getting too worked up over nothing. Maybe I really should just go to sleep."

With that, she turned and walked away.

A few minutes later, Harry emerged from the beneath his Cloak of Invisibility, tucking it into his bag as he checked to make sure his *Effugiat* was still in place.

"Plain black leather with notable texture, brass corner protectors, no marking on the front or back, about ten by six," he muttered to himself, "and someone called 'Tom'." He then turned on his heels and proceeded to walk back to the Slytherin Dorms to write everything down.

He'd been following Ginny closely for the past few weeks, but this was the first time that he'd managed to get a clear, good look at what the Dark Object she'd been carrying around was. It looked innocuous enough, but the dark magic surrounding it was unmistakable. She'd had it for two months already, and it was obvious Ginny was being negatively affected by it, looking more and more sickly as the days went by. Harry had wanted to take it from her as soon as possible, but he needed a solid idea of what the book looked like before he could do anything.

He'd considered going to Dumbledore for help, like he'd done with Quirrell and the stone, but...

He was starting to suspect that the book had something to do with Voldemort. Maybe he was just imagining things, but he couldn't help but get a strange sense of familiarity when he looked at the

magic coming from the book and how it clung to Ginny, being faintly reminded of Quirrell when he saw her carrying it around. It wasn't *exactly* like Quirrell's situation had been, the way the Dark magic seemed to feed off of her own was much more subtle, less overtly disturbing, but it was definitely still *feeding* off her in a manner which definitely resembled what Voldemort's wraith had been doing.

Maybe it was a bit of a stretch to think a book was connected to Voldemort, but if there was any chance he was right then Harry really didn't want the Headmaster to find out about it. It might be Dark, and it might be hurting Ginny, but there might also be a clue in it that could lead Harry to the Dark Lord. Right now he had no idea whatsoever how to find, let alone interact with or help, the wraith that was Voldemort, and this book might be his only option in that regard for a good while. Besides, he'd already made the mistake of revealing Voldemort's wraith to the Headmaster once; he wasn't going to risk doing something like that again.

He entered the Slytherin Common Room and proceeded to his usual corner. Daphne was sitting near the fireplace, reading, and Crabbe was working on an essay. Harry commended the large boy's efforts; they rarely paid off, but his persistence in the face of consistent failure was something Harry could respect.

He sat on the edge of the couch, leaning backwards and closing his eyes to think on his plan.

Ginny carried the book with her everywhere. She never put it down, and she never let it go out of her sight. The few times Harry had caught someone else looking at it, Ginny had hurriedly closed it, and stuffed it back in her bag. He'd heard one of her friends ask her about it once, but she'd hurriedly and rather suspiciously denied knowing what they were talking about. She'd started avoiding Harry a few weeks ago, when he'd made the mistake of trying to talk to her while she was holding the book in her hands, which was why he'd had to resort to sneaking around under the Invisibility Cloak to get a better look at it.

In other words, not only would it be extremely difficult to steal it from her, it would be extremely hard to keep it away from her. Harry had no doubts she would raise quite a commotion if she simply found it to be gone.

Thankfully he had a plan, and his plan was relatively simple; make a copy of the book and all its contents, exchange it with the original, and hopefully she wouldn't realize anything was amiss. The only issue was that, for this plan to work seamlessly, Harry needed a few minutes during which Ginny wouldn't notice the book was gone to make the exchange. But from how paranoid she was acting with it, and how reclusive she was being, Harry was hard pressed even trying to figure out a way to bring her out of the Gryffindor Dormitories, never mind keep her sufficiently distracted for his plan to work. She wouldn't even hang out with her friends, she was barely going to her classes; what would lure her out, distract her enough for just a small amount of time?

“Harry, I’ve missed you!”

Harry grunted as Blaise suddenly dropped onto the couch, his head falling neatly onto Harry's lap as he threw his feet over the couch's armrest carelessly. Somewhere in the back of his mind Harry noted that it definitely wasn't free-day, as Daphne regarded Blaise's propped up feet disapprovingly. Rather, Harry thought, Blaise was probably acting particularly inelegantly specifically to annoy Daphne.

Harry didn't really understand why, but there had always been a clear sense of faint animosity between Blaise and Daphne. They rarely actively went out of their way to antagonize each other, but small displays of deniable animosity like this were common. They pretended to get along around Draco and Pansy, but around Harry they were more honest. Harry wasn't sure if that was

because they felt more comfortable around him or if they just didn't care about his opinion, and he didn't really mind either way. It was all pretty harmless, and Harry found it funny more than anything.

"I saw you an hour ago," he replied to Blaise with a small laugh, absently carding his fingers through the other boy's hair, tangling his fingers in the dark curls. Since the start of the year, he'd occasionally found himself returning Blaise's affection in small ways, like he was now. The physical contact was reassuring, calming in a way that Harry wasn't really used to. Blaise also seemed to find the contact relaxing, and they'd settled into the new dynamic easily. The thought brought a smile to Harry's face, and he looked fondly down at Blaise who had closed his eyes and was slowly drowsing off.

Upon looking back up towards the rest of the room he caught another boy looking at them, who hurriedly turned away blushing as Harry met his eyes. He wanted to laugh at the reaction, but he didn't want to disturb Blaise.

It had always amused Harry how people reacted to Blaise and how much Blaise actively found their reactions annoying. Crushes sprouted around the dark-haired boy like weeds, and most of the students their age had no idea how to handle them other than to turn into red-faced, stuttering messes. A good example of what Blaise had to deal with constantly was how Ginny had reacted when she'd first seen him. She'd been talking perfectly fine with Harry, had been smart and funny and interesting, but as soon as Blaise turned up she'd instantly clammed up even worse than she had when she'd first approached Harry. But Harry was the Boy-Who-Lived, so it made sense she'd be a little star-struck in the beginning; with Blaise there was no excuse. Harry wondered what would have happened if Blaise had actually tried to talk with her like Harry had; would she have been able to hold a proper conversation after a few minutes, or would she have been too nervous to pay attention the whole time? She'd gotten better once in Hogwarts, but Harry knew that she still had a fairly strong crush on the grey-eyed boy; even now, with everything going on with her and the Dark Object it was still obvious, which...

The thought gave Harry pause.

He tapped pointedly on Blaise's shoulder to wake him up; Blaise opened his eyes slowly, giving Harry a confused look. When Harry just stayed silent, he moved to sit up next to him.

"What's wrong?" Blaise asked quietly, knowing instantly that Harry wanted this kept secret.

"I have a favor to ask. You can say no, of course." In spite of finding Blaise's situation mostly amusing, Harry had always actively avoided encouraging other students' feelings in any way. It was one thing for them to have crushes on Blaise, and quite another for them to believe that there was any chance of reciprocation. Blaise had always made it extremely clear to everyone that he was just *not interested*, and Harry did his best to support him with that; the dark-haired boy had to deal with enough idiocy as it was. But in this very specific situation, if Blaise was willing to make an exception to help him out, it would make Harry's life significantly easier.

He wouldn't really have to explain much, since he'd told Blaise about his worries for Ginny earlier in the year, not going into details about the Dark Object but instead just asking him to keep an eye out for her in case her situation drastically worsened when Harry wasn't paying attention. The other boy also already knew about his magic too, so he was the ideal candidate to help Harry with his plan regarding Ginny in a variety of ways.

"What is it?"

"I need you to get Ginny to meet with you in private. I need you to talk to her for a few minutes,

keep her distracted while I figure something out.”

Blaise's eyes widened in surprise, but then narrowed. “This is about that ‘illness’ of hers isn’t it?”

Harry sighed, halfheartedly wishing Blaise wasn’t so quick-witted; it made keeping secrets from him extremely difficult. “If I promise to tell you about it when I confirm what the problem is, will you help me?” Depending on what exactly the book ended up being, he would have to keep some things from the other boy for his own safety, but he’d already talked to Blaise about the dangers of his magic and Blaise had accepted the necessary secrecy easily. He’d also promised to look into protecting his own mind, but that process would take a lot of time no matter what so Harry still had to be careful. That being said, information was always the best thing to offer Blaise in return for favors, and given that this was a pretty big favor to ask of him Harry was willing to make a small exception.

Blaise raised a judging eyebrow at him. “You’re asking me for help because you know she has a crush on me.”

Harry flinched slightly. He *knew* this would annoy Blaise, and Harry didn’t want to upset him further by appearing overly insensitive. He was just running out of options. “You don’t have to, obviously.”

“What would you do instead?”

“I don’t really know. I need to do it as soon as possible for her safety, but she’s become really secretive and closed in. She won’t even hang out with her best friends, and she’s been missing classes.” Harry sighed. “At this rate my only other option might be to kidnap her when she’s going to dinner.”

Blaise chuckled. “Okay, okay, I’ll help you out. No need to sound so pathetic.”

“Hey!” Harry started to complain, but then decided it wasn’t worth the hassle. Blaise was obviously just teasing him, and he’d gotten what he wanted. “Thank you, it’ll make everything much easier for me.”

Blaise moved to lay back down, his expression thoughtful and slightly worried. “What’s wrong with her?”

Harry once again began carding his fingers through Blaise’s hair, letting the contact soothe his anxiety over the Dark Object situation. “I’m not sure, but at least I think I know how to make her better.”

“Hello?”

“Ginny! Thank you for meeting me here on such short notice.” Blaise said, smiling disarmingly. “Please, sit! I’ve been wanting to talk with you.”

Ginny’s face turned a faint baby pink, by far the most color Harry had seen on her in weeks, which was distinctly worrying given her complexion. She quickly joined Blaise at the table by the window, placing her bag by her feet.

Harry was huddled under the desk directly next to them, under the Invisibility Cloak. He'd also cast *Effugiat* and *Silens* on himself, not only to prevent Ginny from hearing or seeing him, but so that he would be able to sneak the book from her bag without her noticing anything was amiss. *Effugiat* was particularly effective in that regard; as long as she was distracted, he should be able to open her bag, get the book out, make a copy of it, and put the copy back in, all without her realizing anything was going on. The Invisibility Cloak might slip when he reached out, or else might obscure her bag in a suspicious way. Meanwhile, as long as her attention was focused elsewhere, *Effugiat* would keep Harry's actions hidden without any difficulties.

He just had to depend on Blaise's acting to keep her sufficiently distracted. On the bright side, it seemed like that wouldn't be much of an issue at all, as Ginny looked fully absorbed into what Blaise was saying.

"I heard from one of your friends that you know a lot about Quidditch." Blaise said with false enthusiasm. "I'm thinking about writing a paper on it, and I wondered if I could ask you for help? I know it's a lot to ask, but I would be incredibly thankful." His voice turned sweet and gentle.

Harry had to hold in a snort. Blaise couldn't care less about Quidditch, but it was something *Ginny* had a significant amount of interest in. It was something Harry knew from the few conversations he'd managed to have with her in the beginning of the year, before she'd become so closed in, so he knew it was an easy subject to get her talking. He was also counting on her crush on Blaise to keep her from thinking too hard on why Blaise would be coming to her specifically for advice on an academic paper; she was a first-year and they weren't really friends, so it didn't really make sense. But Harry was well aware that emotions had a funny way of blinding people, and, as he'd expected, she fell for the excuse easily. She was trying really hard to make a good impression on Blaise, too, and Harry couldn't help but feel a swell of pity for poor, sweet Ginny. Blaise had no interest in her, even if he didn't necessarily mind her as much as he did other people, but Harry knew this meeting had given Ginny hope that would only get crushed later. She hadn't done anything wrong, and she didn't deserve to be hurt and manipulated like this, but Harry was doing it for her own good. Her safety was more important than her feelings.

He reached out his hand and placed it over her bag, extending his *Effugiat* onto it and then, once he was sure it had settled properly, reached into the bag.

There were a variety of objects inside; pens, parchment, other books. But the little black book was unmistakable, not only because of its distinctive leather cover, but because of the sheer darkness of the power that radiated from it. Harry grabbed it, and carefully pulled it out.

Instantly he saw a tendril of its magic shoot backwards towards Ginny. As soon as it made contact with the outer edge of her magic, it abruptly dispersed out onto her power, like tiny rivulets of water scurrying around a window pane. Then, like one of the droplets had been struck with an ice pick, a small section of Ginny's magic cracked and fragmented.

She paused in the middle of her sentence.

"Yes? And then what happened after the Beater was down?" Blaise quickly said, noticing something was wrong, and reached out to tap at her hand. Ginny immediately turned her attention back to him, stuttering out an apology. Her magic rejoined, but the crack was still there. The other droplets pulsed.

Harry felt a frisson of panic run through him. He'd completely overlooked the fact that this book was capable of *possessing people*.

He quickly made a decision.

He took the book out of the bag as quickly as he could, brought it under his Invisibility Cloak, and then, quietly murmured, "*Tempero*."

The spell taking effect was one of the strangest things Harry had ever felt. He'd never cast this spell before, and he was worried about whether it would work, and how it would work, but as his magic reached out of his core and wound around the book's magic, all Harry could feel was serenity. The Dark magic, which had felt so aggressive and greedy before, was suddenly calm and docile, and Harry gently, carefully pulled each droplet away from Ginny's power. He then lead all of it away from Ginny and gently but firmly pressed it to the book's leather covers. Within a few seconds, he'd managed to get all of the book's magic concentrated within the book itself, and Harry let out a deep breath.

With that in place, he tried his hardest to focus. He was now maintaining three complicated spells at once, and he could feel his control was stretched thin. But Harry refused to fail. He was so *close*.

"*Obice*."

It was a spell he was used to casting when he was experimenting with something dangerous, and it was pretty good at keeping everything within a range that he designated, so Harry felt it was a good choice for this situation.

He only hoped that it actually did something. He'd never tried to contain pure magic before, so there was a distinct chance *Obice* wouldn't even work for this purpose, but *Tempero* had worked so surely this would too?

His magic sprung around the book, quickly forming a barrier around it. As soon as the shape solidified, he released his *Tempero*.

The book's magic, which had been lying placid and dormant throughout the whole process, awoke to find itself trapped. Harry watched with relief and some fear as the dark magic furiously rammed into the barrier he'd placed around it, and was held off. He could, however, feel a tiny portion of his own magic was used up by his barrier every time the book's magic thrashed against it, so he knew he wouldn't be able to keep this up indefinitely.

Ginny and Blaise hadn't stopped talking, and Harry let out a sigh of relief.

He then brought out another small black book from his own bag and placed it next to the dark one. He'd made this copy yesterday, as close as he could to what he'd seen the book looked like, so that he wouldn't have to work too hard in the moment. Comparing them, Harry noted with pride that he'd done a pretty good job in imitating the book. The leather cover was very similar, and the general shape of it was almost perfect; even the brass corners looked good, although he'd definitely messed up the edges. Whatever, it wouldn't matter. Satisfied with his appraisal, he placed one hand on the first book, and then the other on the copy.

"*Adsimulo*."

Neither *Obice* nor *Adsimulo* were anywhere near as taxing to Harry's concentration or magic reserves as *Tempero* had been, so he wasn't worried about using another spell now. *Tempero* had been dangerous because he'd never used it before, so neither he nor his magic were familiar with it. But he was extremely comfortable with *Obice*, and he'd had a fair amount of practice with *Adsimulo*, so even using them at the same time wasn't as difficult as *Tempero* alone had been.

Adsimulo and *Fies* were similar, in some ways. They both turned objects from one thing into something else. The main difference between them was that, unlike *Fies*, *Adsimulo* didn't change

an object's actual composition. *Adsimulo* took a chunk of Harry's magic, used part of it to form a 'mask' around a designated object which imitated the original's appearance perfectly, and then it would use the rest to slowly merge with the object. As the magic the spell had borrowed slowly was used up, both the mask and the copying process would begin to fail, and eventually the copy would just settle as a mix between the original and the fake's base.

The reason Harry had created *Adsimulo* was because he'd realized he needed a spell that was capable of imitating an object better than *Fies* could. He couldn't really change every single part of an object easily, so he'd come up with a slightly different idea. *Adsimulo* didn't change an object's composition, it merely changed its outer appearance, like gold plating on a wooden sculpture. The better the sculpture and the better the plating, and the better the final result would be, but if the base object didn't resemble the original object closely enough, *Adsimulo* couldn't really do anything about it. This was why making the base object as similar as possible to the original was important. If all went as planned, and the spell faded properly, it would just appear to Ginny like the black book was fading slowly with time. If the cover was a slightly different color, or some text was blurry, she certainly wouldn't notice after a few months. Besides, Harry was betting that after he separated Ginny from the original's dark magic for a while, she would forget about the book entirely. It wasn't the book itself she liked, after all; it was its magic that was possessing her.

Once he was certain that *Adsimulo* had gripped onto the fake properly, and its mask was in place, he picked up the fresh copy of the Dark Book and opened it, curious as to what lay inside.

It was blank.

Harry frowned, turning the pages.

All blank.

He wondered if he'd messed up the copying spell, but no, he could feel his magic surrounding every page. The mask was active.

He felt a shiver run up his spine.

He closed the copy, and carefully reached over and placed it in her bag, exactly as he could remember the original being before. Then he pulled his hand out and carefully drew the *Effugiat* away from the bag, making it perceivable as usual once again. He released a deep breath, feeling his heart pounding away in his chest. That had been much more nerve-wracking than he'd hoped it would be.

"...but if the Seeker falls through the goals and takes the Quaffle with him while going for the Snitch, does it count as a point or a foul?"

At least Blaise seemed to be having fun.

He quickly placed the Dark book into his own bag and then, once he was sure everything was back in order, he carefully reached over and tapped Blaise's foot.

Blaise abruptly stood up. "Oh, Merlin, I lost track of time! I'm so sorry, Ginny, I promised my friend I would help him with his Herbology homework." He put on an apologetic smile. "But I'm really so thankful for your help today. I learned a lot."

Ginny's eyes widened, and she hurriedly nodded. "You're welcome! It-it was nothing! I'm glad I could help." She also stood, grabbing her bag from the floor. For a moment, she looked confused, and somewhat anxious, but then Blaise placed his hand on her elbow and she was once again

distracted as he gently but firmly pulled her to the door.

“Really, the amount you know is incredible! You'll be trying out for the Gryffindor Quidditch team, I suppose?”

“Thank you, yes, I-”

The door closed behind them, and Harry carefully emerged from under the table. He waited for a few more minutes, until he was sure they were gone, before he finally approached the door and slowly pushed it open. Sure enough, the corridor was empty, and he hurried back to the Slytherin Common Room, feeling as his magic was slowly sapped by the book constantly fighting against his barrier.

“This is it?”

Blaise looked down at the book with incredulity. Harry did suppose that, if one couldn't see the ominous Dark power pouring out from it, it did look pretty plain.

“Yes,” Harry nodded. “It's a very dangerous, very Dark magical object, even if it just looks like a small book.” He grabbed it from the table and flipped through the pages. “It's empty, though.”

“Isn't it a diary, then?”

Harry furrowed his brow. “A diary?” It hadn't occurred to him, but it made sense given the book had no writing on it or even a title of any sort. He placed it back on the desk. He'd learned he could keep the diary's magic from affecting his by keeping a layer of his magic over his skin when he reached inside the barrier, like gloves, but maintaining it as he moved around took a good amount of his concentration so Harry used it sparingly.

Blaise gave him an amused look. “I guess she just never wrote in it.”

Harry didn't think that was true at all, but he nodded. “In any case, I think it was affecting her really badly. Keeping it away from her will hopefully cure her. I don't think it can affect her at this distance.”

Blaise peered at the diary. “If it's so dark and powerful, why aren't you more wary of it? Aren't you afraid it'll affect you too?”

“I've placed a containment ward over it, it should prevent any magic from affecting either of us.” Harry didn't really know how wards worked, exactly, but it was the only regular spell he could think of that was similar to what he'd done.

“You did?” Blaise sounded shocked. “When?”

“Back when I took it from Ginny. I didn't want the magic alerting her.”

Blaise huffed out a breath, placing a hand over his face. “Please tell me you didn't wordlessly, wandlessly cast a containment ward over this diary, just like that.”

Harry coughed. “It wasn't wordless.”

Blaise released a deep sigh. “You really don’t realize how terrifying you are sometimes.”

“It’s not that complicated. It’s just a barrier that keeps some things in, and some things out,” Harry replied with a pout, feeling slightly embarrassed that he’d accidentally made a big deal of what he’d done.

“It’s not that complicated, he says,” Blaise snorted. He placed a hand on Harry’s neck, massaging softly. “Wizards study for decades to be able to create wards that can safely contain powerful Dark objects. Placing one can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days. And not only can *you* create one in a moment, just like that, but you can even do it wandlessly.”

Harry shrugged. It wasn’t his fault Latin was so much better than regular spell magic. “We shouldn’t be discussing this.”

Blaise laughed softly. “Someday you’ll tell me *all* your secrets.”

Harry leaned back against Blaise’s hand, closing his eyes lazily as he let the massage soothe him. “Maybe someday.”

“Hi Blaise! Hi Harry!” Ginny’s voice suddenly rang out behind Harry as he and Blaise were on their way to dinner. It was a month after they’d gotten the diary away from Ginny, and sure enough she had gotten steadily healthier and happier, her magic growing stronger with every passing day.

The first few days had been incredibly stressful for Harry; he had been worried the book would somehow find a way to control Ginny, even from the other side of the castle, but after he’d thought to hide it in one of the many compartments of his trunk, he hadn’t really had any issues with it. It was a very high-quality, expensive piece of luggage, after all, and it would have been fairly disappointing if it couldn’t keep the diary’s magic from leaking out of it.

Meanwhile, Ginny had acted particularly weird for a few days afterwards. Harry could track his own magic easily, and from his *Adsimulo* he’d known she was carrying the copy around with her everywhere she went, so he’d never been too worried that his ploy had been discovered. However, she seemed to be overly stressed about it somehow, frustrated and even sad. Thankfully, as the days went on, and her magic naturally recovered from the experience, she slowly began acting normal again, talking to her friends and going to classes consistently. About four days ago she’d stopped bringing the book outside her dormitory at all, and Harry felt like the whole ordeal had been a resounding success.

“Hello,” Blaise said, his tone and expression carefully muted, and Harry had to suppress a snort at the blatant dismissal. Ginny looked a little hurt, though, and it made Harry feel fairly guilty for having caused her to think that Blaise might like her back, so he made sure his own voice was particularly enthusiastic as he addressed her with a smile. “Hi Ginny! I heard you’re doing really well in your Flying classes, congratulations!”

Thankfully his friendliness was apparently enough to counteract Blaise’s coldness, and Ginny’s hurt was instantly wiped away as she smiled back at him cheerfully. “Thank you, I’ve been practicing a lot recently! I was pretty sick for a while, but...” A frown crossed her face, and Harry quickly shot Blaise a pointed look.

Instantly understanding what Harry was asking, Blaise coughed lightly, shifting his expression into

one of polite interest when Ginny looked towards him. “I’m glad you’re feeling better, then. Are you still looking to join the Quidditch team?”

“Yes, definitely!” She said excitedly, glad Blaise no longer appeared upset with her mere presence. “I can’t wait to try out next year.”

Blaise nodded. “Good luck with that. Please excuse us, we’re heading to dinner now,” he said, pulling on Harry’s arm as they entered the Dining Hall.

“Good luck, Ginny, bye!” Harry managed to get out before he was forcefully dragged to the Slytherin table. He wondered if he should ask Blaise to be a bit nicer to Ginny, but then decided that it was probably best that her crush die off as soon as possible. He sat down with a hum, pleased that his plan had worked so perfectly, and Draco shot him a curious glance.

“What are you so happy about?”

“I was right,” Harry replied cryptically, grinning, and then refused to answer when Draco asked for clarifications. Eventually the blond gave up and began to question Blaise instead, but was met with similar levels of success.

Throughout the dinner, Harry’s mind was on the diary locked in his trunk. He hadn’t taken it out all month for fear that it would somehow affect Ginny, but now that he was sure she was completely free of its influence, it was time for Harry to begin *experimenting*. He couldn’t *wait*. Literally, in fact, so he decided to leave halfway through dinner, giving an excuse to Draco about wanting to work on homework. He hurried back to the dungeons, excited to once again come face to face with the unique, powerful Dark magic of the diary. But, as he took the diary out from his trunk and carefully looked it over, a frown began to grow on his face. It still gave off the same dark aura as before, but the magic tendrils reaching out from the book itself were much smaller and weaker. The movements were slow, lethargic, and even when they reached out near Harry there was very little aggression behind them.

Harry had been prepared to lock down the diary as soon as it was out of its containment, *Temporo* and *Obice* on the tip of his tongue, but this new development was rather surprising. “You’ve been starved, haven’t you?” he murmured to it.

He stood and moved over to his bed, quickly drawing the curtains, making sure they were well closed with a sticking spell and a privacy barrier was set up before he leaned over and opened the diary.

Sure enough, the pages were still blank.

Harry turned to the first page, trying to understand what was going on, and that was when he finally saw the inscription, faded and barely legible.

“T.M. Riddle?” Harry squinted, adjusting his glasses. “Is that who this diary belonged to?”

He turned to the next page. The book’s magic was still placid and weak, and hadn’t really tried to attack him at all yet, so Harry felt like there was little to be worried about.

He carefully inspected the entirety of the diary for the next while. He couldn’t find any more writing in it, and try as he might he couldn’t figure out how to activate the diary, or find any clue as to why it had attacked Ginny.

Harry frowned as he looked down at the diary, flipping through its blank pages. Ginny *had* to have written something in here somewhere. At least in the beginning, when its magic wasn’t affecting

her too badly yet, there was no way she'd just carried around a blank diary and never tried to write in it *once*. He'd never seen her do it, since she'd always been extremely secretive over the diary, but he'd seen her looking inside it once or twice so there *had* to be something that was being hidden.

Maybe writing in it was the way to start. In the worst case scenario, if the book reacted aggressively to being written on, Harry would simply contain it once again. If nothing happened, then Harry would simply clean the ink off. It certainly wouldn't hurt to try, he thought, as he reached over to the bedside table and grabbed a quill.

He then turned the diary to the second page, and, without much preamble, began to write.

<Dear Diary, tell me your secrets.>

It had worked for the mirror, why not this diary?

For a few seconds nothing happened.

Harry tapped on the edge of the diary pensively, beginning to feel a bit silly for thinking that something like that would work again. Should he clean it off? Write some more? Maybe try a drawing? But before he could decide what to do next, he suddenly noticed the ink was being absorbed by the parchment like a sponge. Within moments the page was blank again, his words having vanished without a trace.

Harry blinked at the diary. Was that it, then? This book was just a kind of self-erasing diary? A bit underwhelming, all things considered, but interesting nonetheless; especially if there was a way to call back previous things he'd written, it would be very useful as a kind of secret-

His musings were interrupted when his ink suddenly reappeared on the page.

The words depicted, however, were different.

<<Hello, Dear Writer. Tell me, what secrets do you want to know about?>>

Chapter End Notes

it's
the
BOY

Latin Trans [I'll usually only translate words when they are first introduced but here's all the ones in this chapter :D]:

Tempero: control, temper | Illuminare: illuminate, light | Ignis: fire, ignite | Volito: flit, flight | Silens: silence | Obice: barrier, obstruction | Fies: you will become | Adsimulo: assimilate, pretend | Effugiat: unnoticeable, elude |

I'm working on adding translations for the previous chapters, but it's a bit tricky to do properly so it'll take me some time! I appreciate your patience :)

Thank you so much for all your support! Your comments are an absolute delight to read <3

I hope you enjoyed this chapter, thank you for reading <3

Memoria

Chapter Notes

Diary dialogue:

<Hello>: Harry

<<Hello>> : Tom

‘...’ indicates the character paused while writing. ie: <Hello...Tom> is actually <Hello *pause* Tom>.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Harry stared at the diary for a long while, carefully observing the words until they began to recede back into the pages.

What was this, then? The diary wrote *back*?

Harry frowned. He'd considered the idea that the Dark Object might be some kind of powerful artifact - or maybe just a book in which to keep secrets - but he'd never imagined that it would be in any way *sentient*. That was something he'd never really dealt with in an experiment before, and part of Harry wondered if he was biting off more than he could chew. Maybe he shouldn't really be-

He realized suddenly that the words had nearly vanished at this point, and he instantly made a decision. His wariness had prevented him from figuring out the Mirror of Erised last year, and Harry regretted deeply not having investigated it more when he had the chance; he wasn't going to make the same mistake twice. So before the words could fully disappear Harry quickly brought his quill back down on the page, afraid that if he took too long to respond the diary would never write to him again, and that would be the end of that.

<What are you?>

For a moment nothing happened, and Harry feared he'd been too late anyways. But after a few seconds ink began to reappear, and he let out a sigh of relief.

<<I am an enchanted diary, created to help Hogwarts students. May I have your name?>>

Interesting description for a Dark Object, Harry thought, and his eyes narrowed as he considered the question.

Maybe he was being paranoid because of the way the diary had phrased the request, but he wasn't entirely comfortable with the idea of telling dangerous Dark Objects he'd just met his full name. For all he knew, once he did that he'd activate some kind of secret ritual that would bind him to do this diary's bidding forever, like a deal with the fae. Or a demon.

He glanced over at the diary's magic; it was as pliant as before. Well, just his first name would probably be safe enough.

<My name is Harry.>

<<It is nice to meet you, Harry. My name is Tom Riddle.>>

"Huh," Harry said faintly, "So that's who Ginny was talking about."

But what did that mean? Why would a diary have a name? Had this diary belonged to a Tom Riddle before? 'Tom' had mentioned he'd been created specifically to help Hogwarts students, and although Harry was pretty sure the reason was a lie it still implied this diary been created by someone in particular. Maybe it had just been given that name by its creator, then, similar to what had probably happened to the Sorting Hat. Now that he thought about it, this diary *was* rather similar to the Sorting Hat in many ways, so maybe they were the same kind of magical object. But then again, why the name? If this diary was meant to work in a similar way to the Sorting Hat, why not just call it something like 'The Helpful Diary'? 'Tom Riddle' was a very obviously human name, and it felt strange to attribute it to an object for no reason.

<If I may ask, why do you have a human name? Aren't you just a diary?>

The diary was quiet for a moment, and Harry began to feel worried he'd asked a question it couldn't answer. Maybe it just had specific answers to specific questions? Like a 'choose your own adventure' book? But before he could ask something different, words reappeared.

<<I am not just a diary. I am a memory of a 6th year student that went to Hogwarts many years ago, placed within this diary for posterity.>>

Harry's eyebrows rose in surprise. A memory? Now what on earth did *that* mean? How could a memory be placed within a diary, or any object for that matter? Was that what the Sorting Hat was too, a memory of a person who had lived before, placed within a hat? Did that mean that this diary was capable of thinking and reasoning? Harry didn't even know how the Sorting Hat really worked, could *it* think? Was it even possible for something like the Sorting Hat to be alive? Did thinking have to be limited to living beings only? What *were* thoughts, really?

Harry shook his head. Philosophy was too far off topic for now, but the issue of whether this diary was like the Sorting Hat was one he would want an answer to, if possible. It would at least give him *some* idea of what he was dealing with.

<I have a question, although I don't know if you can answer it. Do you have the same limitations to your existence as the Sorting Hat? That is to say, do you function as a living being, but only in a specific capacity and at a certain time?>

The diary was once again quiet, but this time its magic flared around it from its previously languid state, coiling around the diary in a variety of small tendrils that looked almost like tiny snakes. <<You ask very interesting questions.>> The words were innocuous enough, but Harry couldn't help but get a distinct sense of threat emanating from the diary's magic.

He had to contain his laughter at the idea that a Dark object that he could easily contain with a simple *Obice* was trying to intimidate him like this. It felt like it was a toddler who was trying to pick a fight with an adult. He wasn't going to point that out to the diary, but the imagery was too funny to ignore completely, and he suddenly wondered if 'Tom' could be taunted.

<I suppose a mere diary like this wouldn't know the answer to something like that. I'll stick to simpler questions from now on.> He wrote, and then settled back to watch the diary's reaction.

Tom didn't disappoint. Almost instantly a tendril from the diary's magic slashed at the table, startling Harry with its suddenness and making him wonder if he'd have to contain the diary again. But upon inspection of the diary's magic he realized that that tendril had not been infused with power at all, which meant that the action was almost certainly not performed on purpose. If anything, that had looked awfully similar to a genuine display of emotion rather than an attack, and

as soon as Harry realized this he began to grin excitedly.

So, not only was this diary capable of being taunted, it was capable of feeling genuine anger. The diary didn't know Harry could see its magic, so even if it could somehow control its innate magic perfectly - which was almost impossible without infusing it with *some* power, at least in Harry's experience - it wasn't like it would be making that motion just for show. Tom had to have *felt* that anger for his magic to have expressed it so strongly.

<<I apologize if I gave you that impression, I was merely surprised. But to answer your question, I am not limited to any particular subject or situation like the Sorting Hat. I have extremely diverse capabilities, and I think you'll find that there are very few things I cannot provide some assistance with.>>

In spite of Tom's clear anger the words were both helpful and polite, and Harry was fairly impressed at the diary's ability to 'lie', so to speak. He'd never gotten that sort of impression from the Sorting Hat, and that more than anything really made Harry feel like he was talking to a human right now.

Was that possible? Tom had mentioned he was a memory, could that mean that he was actually just a person? A specific instance of a person, maybe, but was that really possible?

<Are you a person?>

<<I am a memory of a person.>>

Harry frowned at Tom's answer. It would have been easy for him to just take that as a 'no', but it really seemed like Tom was being purposefully abstruse and that piqued Harry's curiosity. <In what way is being a 'memory of a person' different from just being a person?>

<<Why is this such an important topic to you?>>

<Call it an interest in my investments. I want to know what exactly I'm dealing with here.> He'd spent a good amount of time figuring out how to get this diary away from Ginny; even if it *was* unexpectedly sentient, he wasn't just going to let it be.

<<I am the memory of a Hogwarts student from many years ago, here to help with your school life.>> Clearly, that was his story and he was sticking to it.

Harry considered the diary carefully. Asking nicely wasn't getting him anywhere, but on the other hand the diary could feel anger, so maybe it could also feel threatened?

<Would you like to know how I acquired this diary?>

The diary did not instantly respond, but its magic jerked back and forth almost like a cat's tail, and Harry couldn't stop watching it.

<<Do tell.>> Tom replied eventually.

Harry guessed that, from the jerkiness of his magic's movements as the words emerged, Tom was able to tell that the question had not been made innocently. The thought made him grin.

<I took it from Ginny Weasley.> He wanted to see what Tom would do with that piece of information, if he'd realize what it implied.

From the way the diary's magic went still, he probably did.

<<You took it from her?>> He wrote back after a few seconds. <<That's not very nice, Harry. Maybe you should give it back.>>

Harry snorted at Tom's attempt to escape him. Clearly, he could tell Harry wouldn't be quite as easy prey as Ginny had been. Poor, sweet, sincere Ginny. Harry was certainly not going to give the diary back to her.

<You were making her sick, Tom, so I don't think you're in any position to tell me whether I'm being nice or not.>

In front of him, the diary's magic froze completely.

<<Making her sick? I have no idea what you are talking about. Are you perhaps referring to the cold she had?>>

Harry had to laugh at that. A cold, sure. If they were going with that excuse, then Quirrell had only had a cold, too. <Save it, Tom. I know exactly what you were doing.>

The diary did not reply. After a few minutes of staring at a blank page, Harry decided to try being even more direct. He might as well at this point.

<If you don't want to talk about Ginny, that's fine. Instead, how about you tell me if you are connected to the Dark Lord in any way?>

<<The Dark Lord? Who is that?>>

Harry might have been deceived by the words Tom had written, but his magic was too honest, and it had begun emitting a cold, dangerous aura at the mention of Voldemort's title. <No need to lie to me. Tell me, then, did you belong to him in the past?>

<<What do you know about the Dark Lord?>> Clearly Tom had realized simply denying Harry's accusations wasn't going to work, and Harry grinned at his change in tone.

<What do *you* know about him?>

<<You will answer my question first.>>

Harry raised an eyebrow, once again amused at the diary's attempts to intimidate him. <No.>

Tom seemed shocked at his refusal, his magic going momentarily still and then snapping at Harry angrily. <<I will tell you nothing.>>

Harry rolled his eyes, still amused but now also faintly exasperated. Trying to get information from Tom was like pulling teeth.

In any case, being blunt was no longer working. What else was there to try? How could he get Tom to open up to him, or at least relax a little bit? Harry frowned. Tom wanted to go back to Ginny, which meant that he probably would feel more comfortable if Harry pretended to be a more earnest, genuine person. Maybe he could pretend to be an idealistic supporter of the Dark Lord, and hopefully lower Tom's guard a bit with some careless remarks.

<All I know is that he used to be a powerful wizard with great ideals. I really admired him and I would have gladly supported him, but sadly he died.>

There *was* the chance that Harry had completely misjudged this diary, and in claiming to be a

supporter of the Dark Lord he had just ruined his chances of gaining any further information. As unlikely as it was given his pitch-black magic, maybe Tom was actually a *Light* supporter.

But thankfully, the diary's magic calmed down significantly at his words, so at least Harry knew he'd guessed his allegiances correctly. <<That's not true.>>

Harry raised an eyebrow at Tom's words. That was definitely an interesting answer, especially given the circumstances. If Tom had known the Dark Lord had died, he would have probably answered with a simple agreement. If he had *not* known the Dark Lord had died, Harry would have expected him to say something like 'There's no way', a denial borne of disbelief rather than actual knowledge.

But saying 'That's not true' implied a significant level of certainty on Tom's behalf, and that was very suspicious. How would a diary like this know the Dark Lord was not dead, when as far as Harry knew only he and Dumbledore were aware of that fact?

Harry decided to prod a bit more, pretending further ignorance since it had worked well the first time. <I'm sorry to say, but it happened more than a decade ago.>

Tom's magic flicked at him in response, annoyed. <<You don't understand. It is impossible for the Dark Lord to be dead. He may be weakened, but he is *not* dead.>>

He sounded exceedingly certain of Voldemort's survival; now if he would only tell Harry *why* he thought that. <How can you possibly know that?>

Tom's magic whirled around him thoughtfully in response, and it took him nearly five whole minutes to decide what to reply. Meanwhile, Harry was happy to observe his magic's movements curiously. He'd never before seen someone whose magic was this expressive, and it was frankly fascinating to watch in action.

Eventually words appeared once again. <<Since you are a supporter of the Dark Lord, I will tell you how I know he is alive. The truth is, I am created of his magic. If I am alive, then so is he.>>

Harry stared at the words. This diary was created by Voldemort *himself*? He couldn't believe it, this was infinitely better than anything he'd imagined when he'd first seen the Dark Object.

<I lied before, I apologize.> Harry wrote, intending to explain himself now that he had a better grasp of the situation. If Tom really was connected to Voldemort so directly, there was no need for Harry to pretend around him anymore. <I->

<<That is also not true.>>

Harry raised an eyebrow at Tom's interruption, bemused by him even with the new information. <What, are you created of my magic too? As long as you're not lying, neither am I?>

Tom's magic flicked at him with clear annoyance. <<Very funny, but no. One of my abilities is to be able to sense a person's sincerity. If you ever lie to me, I will know.>>

Sense his sincerity? Harry frowned. How could...

He gave a sharp look to the diary's magic as it wove around his hand holding the quill. He sent the magic a spark of power as a warning, but it only retracted a small distance, looking wary now but also exceedingly curious. <You can sense my sincerity with your magic? How?>

<<I did tell you I had extremely diverse capabilities. But I'm curious, how did you figure *that* out?>

>>

Harry realized he hadn't thought his question through carefully. Even if Tom wasn't really dangerous to Harry, he still shouldn't just be spilling his secrets like that. He thought about just lying, but given that apparently the diary could *tell* he was lying, he figured he might as well just ignore the question altogether.

<I suppose, technically, I didn't lie. But the Dark Lord was killed eleven years ago, and everyone believes he is dead even now.>

<<They are wrong.>>

Harry let out an exasperated huff. So since Harry wasn't going to answer Tom's questions, Tom was now going to be entirely unhelpful with his own answers, was that it?

On the other hand, Harry then thought, it was also possible that this diary simply had no idea *why* Voldemort wasn't dead, it just knew he wasn't. Maybe Tom would be better able - and hopefully also willing - to give him an answer if Harry gave him some more details, since it was clear that Tom had no knowledge of what happened on the night Voldemort had tried to kill Harry.

<In that case, maybe you can explain to me how someone would survive getting hit with the Killing Curse.>

The diary's magic went still for a few seconds, which Harry took to mean that Tom was honestly surprised by what he'd just told him. Interesting, but it did not bode well for Harry learning more about the situation. <<That *is* hard to explain. How do you know he survived?>>

Well, even if Tom really *didn't* know anything, Harry still didn't mind discussing the situation with him. If this all went well, it might be worth the effort to become allies with him. Even if Tom was just a diary, he was certainly the most interesting one Harry had ever seen, and the fact that he was created of Voldemort's magic meant that Harry was definitely not going to be getting rid of him regardless.

<I saw him as a wraith, possessing one of our Professors.> The diary's magic gave a strange whirl; Harry wasn't sure what that one meant.

<<What do you mean, wraith? Why is he possessing a Professor?>>

Harry frowned. <I don't *actually* know what he is, or why he was doing that. All I know is that he is extremely weak, and is in hiding.> Harry paused for a moment, feeling oddly nervous about revealing the next bit of information. But if he was honestly going to try and become allies with Tom, he needed to be honest with him. <To be perfectly honest, I didn't know it was him and I... may have accidentally revealed him to Dumbledore, who tried to capture him. But he failed and the Dark Lord escaped, so all is well!>

He wondered for a moment if the diary would even know who Dumbledore was, but the tendril of Tom's magic once again slashing downwards was a fairly strong indicator that he not only knew Dumbledore, but he also knew exactly how dangerous Harry's mistake had been.

<<You did *what*?>>

<I didn't know, I swear! You can feel my sincerity, can't you?> Harry wrote hurriedly, trying to appease him. <And he escaped! He's out there alive and well!> Or he was alive, at least, Harry supposed he wasn't really 'well' as a wraith.

<<You will pay for this mistake.>> Tom's anger was palpable.

Realizing Tom was probably not a forgiving person by nature, Harry decided to switch tactics.
<How about you tell me how I can help him now and I will pay him back that way?>

Tom considered his words for a few seconds, his magic slowly coiling around the edges of the diary in the way that reminded Harry of tiny snakes, poised to strike at any moment. He looked less overtly furious, but Harry got the distinct sense that he was still quite upset.

<<If you want to help, return me to that girl, Ginny. I was doing fine on my own, my plan would have succeeded and I would have been able to bring him back if you hadn't interfered.>>

Bring him back? If Tom was saying what Harry thought he was saying, that would be quite interesting information. Since last year, Harry had had his own suspicions about the Dark Lord's wraith and what he'd been trying to do with Quirrell and the Stone, but this was the first time he'd gotten a solid lead that the Dark Lord could, in fact, be resurrected. For a variety of reasons, Harry was very interested in figuring out exactly how to do that.

And the fact that this diary apparently already had a method was *very* interesting indeed.

<What exactly does your plan involve?>

<<That is none of your concern.>>

Harry rolled his eyes. Did Tom really think that would work? <Given that you are in my possession, and therefore I can decide what happens to you, I would say it is most definitely my concern.>

The book was silent, and Harry sighed. Time to dig at Tom's weakness again, he supposed.

<Don't be so stubborn. Surely the great Dark Lord doesn't need you to resort to harming *children* to be resurrected? That would be incredibly pathetic, I really thought he was better than that.>

Just as Harry had expected, the diary's magic flickered in indignation at his taunt.

<<It is not *needed*, of course. Very well, you are insufferable, but we will do it your way. There is a place in this school that is extremely well hidden, where Salazar Slytherin himself stored all his books and knowledge. It is called the Chamber of Secrets.>>

Harry felt his heart suddenly begin to beat faster. <You mean it contains books written by Salazar Slytherin himself?>

<<Caught your attention, did I?>> Harry peered at the diary with narrowed eyes, not liking how smug Tom's magic suddenly looked. He hadn't even realized magic *could* look smug before now.

<I think anyone would be interested in that.>

<<There is no need to hide from me. If you want secrets, knowledge, power, I can lead you to them.>>

That didn't sound suspicious at all. <Why would you do that?>

<<My research is stored within the desk in his library, a variety of notes from back from when I was last in this school. However, I need your help to reach the Chamber to retrieve it. It is only

right that I offer you a reward in return.>>

Harry considered his words. <That seems fair. What research?>

<<I would assume it is beyond your level, unfortunately.>>

Harry scowled, his pride stinging. <Tell me anyways.>

<<If you insist.>> Tom conceded easily. <<It involves ancient rituals on the creation of immortal vessels in which to store a soul. If the Dark Lord is a wraith, as you say, then it will be invaluable in allowing him to return to power.>>

Harry blinked at the diary in surprise. He hadn't really expected Tom to actually tell him anything, much less in such detail. <It sounds very interesting. I hope you don't mind sharing it with me when we get it?>

<<Not at all. It is always a delight to meet someone else who shares my passion for knowledge.>>

Something about Tom's sudden change in attitude felt distinctly off to Harry, but he shook off the feeling of unease it gave him. If he started getting suspicious of Tom every time he decided to be cooperative, they'd never get anywhere. Besides, Harry had his magic; even if Tom *did* intend to trick him, it wasn't like he'd really be able to do anything.

<One more thing. In the Dark Lord's later years, his followers say he started to go insane. Do you have any idea why that would have happened?> He wasn't sure when Voldemort had created this diary, but there was a chance Tom knew something about his mysterious and horrific fall from grace.

<<Insane? What do you mean?>>

Okay, so probably not. Still, if they were going to work together he might as well let Tom know what had happened.

<I'm not too clear on the details myself, but from what I know, over the course of a few years he went from being one of the most well-respected, well-liked politicians in Europe, to completely, violently, irrationally mad. Just...complete insanity, mindless violence, even torturing of his own followers for no apparent reason. I was hoping you'd have a clue as to why.>

Tom didn't respond for a few seconds.

<<I understand your concern. Unfortunately I do not know what happened, but I am certain my method will banish any curse or illness that would have befallen him, and restore him to greatness.>>

Harry frowned, skeptical, but he had to admit that he didn't really have any idea of what Tom's plan was so he couldn't really judge. He supposed he'd find out once he went to the Chamber and read his research himself.

Besides, if anyone would be able to help Harry resurrect Voldemort's wraith, a sentient diary with the darkest magic Harry had ever seen, who was allegedly made from Voldemort's own power would be... definitely not what Harry had *expected*, but at least significantly better than anyone else Harry could consult with at the moment.

<I'll trust you with that, then.>

<<Thank you. Your trust in me is highly valued.>>

Something about the way the words were phrased raised warning bells in Harry's mind, and all of a sudden he realized that he was feeling unusually calm for the situation he was in. He could feel a strange tug near his wrist, and as he looked down he saw that the diary's magic was winding around his hand, curling tendrils around Harry's fingers.

A large section of it was clamped around his magic, and was slowly, stealthily, steadily feeding.

Harry quickly snatched his hand away and clamped a barrier around the diary, feeling annoyance course through him at having been distracted so easily. He could feel that the diary hadn't gotten too much power out of him, but it was still incredibly unsettling to know his magic had been eaten from like that. It was different from when he used a spell, or even from when he 'fed' the bloodwand. In those moments it was a conscious choice, or at the very least a clear exchange. But here the diary was just *taking* Harry's power like it belonged to him.

"*Obice*," Harry murmured, letting it coat his arms like gloves. He berated himself for not doing that earlier, feeling stupid for having trusted a dark magical object that had already proven itself dangerous, even if it *was* weakened.

The worst part was that he could tell that his magic didn't feel endangered or even bothered by this at all. Which was really quite worrying, given that the diary had been quite literally *eating it*. Even now Harry's magic seemed to be reaching out from the barrier, at ease with the proximity to the diary and looking like it really wouldn't mind getting eaten again, even as Harry glowered at it. It had never even occurred to him that this was an issue he'd ever have to deal with, where his magic's self-preservation would just...go missing, just like that. It was usually *really* good at keeping him safe, too, even when Harry himself was being careless. Why was this situation so different?

Harry frowned as an idea occurred to him. What if it was another power the diary had? It would make sense; if the victim's magic fought back every time Tom tried to absorb it, it would probably make the process extremely difficult. Maybe he had some kind of...magical allure that made his victim's magic more pliant, even willing to be eaten from? The idea was rather disturbing, but the alternative was honestly even worse.

It didn't really matter, in any case. Regardless of what his magic felt, *Harry* didn't want it getting eaten at all.

He reached out for the book again.

<Don't do that.>

Tom's magic poked at the barrier around his arms curiously. <<What have you done? What spell is this?>>

<That is none of your concern. Don't steal my magic, or I will not cooperate with you any further.>

Tom didn't reply for a few seconds, and then his magic retracted.

<<I give you my word I will not steal your magic again. And, I apologize. Due to how I was made, I cannot help myself from trying to obtain power from those who write to me, to sustain myself. I mean you no ill-will in doing so.>>

Harry blinked. It sounded suspicious, but, to be honest, it did make sense. He had noticed very clearly how the diary had grown more powerful the longer it had been around Ginny, and how its

power had diminished considerably after being locked in Harry's trunk for a month. It was fair to assume that even if the diary wasn't a creature of flesh and blood, it still needed *some* kind of sustenance.

<I understand. If that is how you were made, there is no helping it.>

<<If we are in agreement, then would you like me to tell you how to find the Chamber?>>

<Yes, please. Can you draw a map?>

<<A map is not needed. Instead, I'll simply show you where the Chamber is. Let me take you back 50 years ago.>>

Suddenly, the diary's magic seemed to swell in power, multiplying in strength in moments until it covered the entire bed.

Before Harry could do anything, he was suddenly absorbed within the darkness, and dragged into the diary.

Harry quickly stood up from where he'd tumbled onto the floor, looking around him wildly.

“Tom! What did you do?” he said, not really expecting to get an answer. “What on earth was that?”

He noted with relief that he was still in Hogwarts, although where exactly, he was unsure. When, exactly, was also up for debate. Fifty years ago, Tom had said?

Suddenly, from down the corridor, he could see a figure walking towards him. It was a tall dark-haired boy, wearing a cloak and Slytherin robes. He looked long-limbed and lean, like he'd maybe just gone through a growth spurt, except nothing about him looked awkward in the slightest.

Most notably, his magic was an enormous, ink-black cloud around him, imposing even at a distance.

Harry debated his options for a moment before deciding to simply address him directly.

“Excuse me, I think I'm lost,” he called out.

The other boy did not react to him in any way. Harry frowned.

“Excuse me-”

Suddenly, a voice rang out behind Harry, causing him to jump in fright. “Tom!”

Harry turned, and his mouth dropped open.

There stood Dumbledore, looking significantly younger, and *ginger*.

“Yes, Professor?” Harry heard a smooth, pleasant voice come from behind him.

Neither Dumbledore nor the dark-haired boy had acknowledged his existence in any way so far, which lead Harry to believe that he was acting as an outside observer that they could not interact

with. Part of him wanted to test out this theory, but the other feared that if he tried to interfere something bad would happen, like a time-travel paradox of some sort. Just to be safe he decided to simply stay back and watch this all play out quietly and obediently, like he was probably supposed to. With that in mind, Harry moved to stand close a wall to watch the two figures from the sideline. *This must be Tom Riddle*, Harry thought as the other boy approached. He observed him carefully, curious as to what the person he'd been talking to looked like.

He had dark brown hair that fell in soft waves around his face, framing his high cheekbones and the sharp curve of his jaw. His skin was smooth and pale, with only the slightest hint of a tan, and in contrast to his other, more angular features, his eyes were large and round, almost doe-like, clear and burgundy-brown in color.

All in all he was really quite attractive, but his magic was the thing that really caught Harry's attention.

Tom's magic was utterly breathtaking.

Before now, Harry had never seen anyone who came even close to having as much magic as Dumbledore did. The sheer volume of it was incredible, and it towered over everyone else's at all times without even trying. But now, seeing them next to each other, it was clear that Tom's magic was even *larger* than Dumbledore's. It covered the entire hall like a massive black shroud that flared all around him, overpowering and magnificent in its grandeur.

The other factor that astounded Harry was how impossibly *black* Tom's magic was. His power was like an unending, inescapable sea of darkness that absorbed all nearby light, and shrouded the boy in a veil of shadows so thick that it was almost hard to see through, a phenomenon that Harry had only ever encountered with the Dark Object. In fact, Harry was completely certain that the diary's magic actually belonged to Tom; even in its extremely weakened state, that deep, rich, pitch-black darkness was unmistakable.

On the other hand, what stood out to Harry about Dumbledore's magic was that it seemed to be significantly more *gray* than Harry remembered it being. Harry frowned as he peered at it carefully. He was sure he was not imagining the difference, given how incredibly white it was back in his own time. It was certainly strange but, if he was being honest, he much preferred it in this shade. It just looked more normal. In any case, the sheer amount of power was still the same, still exactly as awe-inspiring as it was back in his own time.

Having both Tom and Dumbledore together in the same space was thus truly quite incredible, and Harry couldn't help but compare the way their magic behaved as well. Where Dumbledore's magic was steady and smooth, glowing and pulsing around him like a halo, Tom's was carefully coiled and clearly predatory, like a giant, towering hydra with infinite serpent heads that snapped around him continuously. It really reminded Harry of the diary's magic, which made sense since Tom *was* the diary, but seeing it like this was-

"What are you doing out so late?" Dumbledore's question snapped Harry out of his thoughts, and he switched his focus to what was actually happening in front of him instead of just staring at both wizards' magic.

He noticed with interest that while Dumbledore's tone was carefully polite, his magic was tense and icy like it had been when Harry told him about the stone. The Headmaster had also clearly gotten better at controlling his facial expressions with age, since right now it wasn't hard for Harry to see that Dumbledore was not particularly fond of Tom even without looking at his magic. For his part, Tom seemed to return the sentiment quite clearly, although *his* expression was faultless and it was only his magic's continued snaps in Dumbledore's direction that gave him away.

That level of animosity seemed strange to Harry, especially coming from the Headmaster. It was one thing for a student to dislike a teacher but quite another for a teacher to dislike a student, especially *this* much.

Harry would have assumed it had something to do with Tom's allegiance to the Dark Lord, but even if Dumbledore knew that Tom Riddle was associated with Voldemort, it still didn't really make sense. From what Harry knew, Voldemort wasn't yet active at this time, even as a politician. And even if he had been recruiting people in secret for long before his first public appearance, it made no sense that Dumbledore felt so much antagonism towards Voldemort's political goals that he was taking it out on a student that supported him. In fact, from what Harry had seen, the Headmaster wasn't even particularly biased against Slytherin students who had parents who had actively been Death Eaters.

So why did he seem to dislike Tom so much?

"I was merely coming back from the library, sir. There was a book I wanted to check out for my paper in Charms." Tom's voice was sweet and polite, his expression innocent and open. If Harry hadn't known better, he would have easily believed the facade that Tom was putting on. The boy was clearly a good actor.

But apparently not good enough to fool Dumbledore, who regarded him with slightly narrowed eyes. "Hurry along, then. As a Prefect you should be setting a good example and not staying out after curfew without good reason."

Tom's magic looked like it wanted to tear into Dumbledore, but his facial expression remained sweet and unperturbed. "Of course, Professor, I apologize for my carelessness. Have a good night."

With that, Tom quickly swept away from Dumbledore and continued down the corridor. Harry hurried after him, worried that if he lost sight of Tom he wouldn't be able to find him again, and feeling more nervous the more he was around this unfamiliar Dumbledore.

They soon reached the Slytherin Common Room, and upon nearing the entrance, the large snake statue at the entrance suddenly turned towards them. Harry stopped instantly, startled, wondering for a moment if it could somehow see him before deciding that that was highly unlikely.

§*What troubles you, heir?*§

§*Nothing for you to worry about.*§ Tom replied. §*It will be taken care of shortly.*§

The snake curled its head, appearing to bow. §*I and my kin are forever at your service.*§

Tom didn't reply, but after a few more seconds of standing in front of the statue quietly, he turned on his heel and set out into the castle once again. Harry went after him, confused and wondering what all that had been about.

He quickly realized that they were going to the second floor. It was after curfew, so it was very unlikely that they would run into any other students on the way, but Tom still made sure to avoid the main corridors and only take lesser known paths, many of which Harry had not even known existed. Harry marveled at how well the other boy knew his way around the castle.

Eventually, they reached a room near the end of a corridor on the second floor, and with a look to make sure no one else was around, Tom carefully opened the door and slipped inside. Harry quickly followed after him.

The room was a lavatory. Harry glanced around as the other boy moved further inside, noting with

some discomfort that it was a girl's lavatory. Why had they come here?

He walked up to Riddle, who was standing near one of the sinks in the middle of the room, and staring at one of them in particular. Harry hesitated for a moment, before crouching down to get a better look.

On the handle, near the back, there was a tiny engraving of a snake.

§Open§, Tom said, and everything went black.

Harry suddenly found himself alone, back on his bed, with the diary open in front of him. He picked up his quill with trembling hands. <What did you do?>

<<I showed you my memory of where the Chamber is, merely another one of my various talents. Why, would you have preferred a map?>> Harry rolled his eyes at Tom's obvious taunt, feeling his nerves vanish instantly.

It was strange to think that now Harry knew what Tom had looked like, what he'd sounded like. He really *had* been a person. Harry had already known that, but now it *felt* real.

<Not at all, it was a very interesting experience. I *would* prefer it if you'd given me a warning, it was very disorienting to suddenly find myself fifty years in the past with no explanation.>

<<My apologies, I did not think of that. Have you never used a Pensieve?>

<No. Does it do something similar?>

<<Almost exactly. They're very interesting artifacts, in a variety of ways.>>

Harry nodded, storing the information to research it later. <I'll have to look into that sometime. In any case, just to be clear, I go to the girl's lavatory on the 2nd floor, say 'open', and...that's it?>

Tom's magic froze. <<'Open'? What do you mean?>>

Harry hesitated, surprised by Tom's surprise. Had he misheard what the other boy had said in the memory? <In the bathroom, you looked at the sink with the snake and said 'open', I thought? Or did I mishear?>

The diary did not respond, and his magic began to whirl around him strangely.

Harry began to get worried.

<Tom? Is something wrong?>

<<No, my apologies, I was just thinking for a moment. I have a question for you, actually.>>

<What is it?>

<<Did you hear my conversation with the snake statue?>>

<The one in front of the Common Room? Yes, I was surprised, I thought they only ever talked to

me. Do they call everyone 'heir', then?>

Tom's magic gave a strange twitch. <<Yes, as they should. Harry, may I know what your surname is?>>

Harry blinked at the sudden change in topic. He hadn't originally given Tom his full name, but he supposed at this point he might as well. <I'm Harry Potter. Why?>

The diary was once again silent for a while, magic swirling around him, but now Harry was fairly sure that just meant Tom was thinking and so he waited patiently. Maybe he'd known one of Harry's ancestors, or even gone to school with them? He'd have to ask Tom about that at some point.

Finally Tom began writing once again.

<<Harry, when I spoke to the snake statue did my voice sound unusual in any way?>>

Harry thought back to the memory.

<Not that I could tell. Why?>

Tom's magic began flicking out lightly at the edges. <<Unfortunately, memories like that one don't always transfer perfectly to the recipient, and I just needed to make sure that you could hear me properly. But yes, you are correct. To open the Chamber, you must go up to the sink with the small serpent carving on it and say the word 'open'.>>

Harry nodded, satisfied with the explanation. Something like a memory transfer did seem like it would be a very complex piece of magic with many possible complications, so of course Tom wanted to make sure Harry heard him correctly.

Harry could feel himself beginning to grow excited. He was really going to find the Chamber of Secrets! And within it Slytherin's Library! He couldn't *wait*.

Except he actually *did* have to wait this time, because he really didn't think it was a good idea to attempt an expedition like this for the first time while all of the other students were still in the castle.

<Well, it's been lovely talking to you Tom, but I won't be going to the Chamber until Christmas Break, so it'll be a little while. I'll let you know when I decide on a specific date. Goodbye for now.>

<<Goodbye, Harry. I'll see you then.>>

"I think I'm ready."

"You've been meditating at least once per week?"

"Just like you said."

"You finished reading all the books?"

“Yes.”

“Did you have any trouble with them?”

“A little, I’ll admit. I wasn’t expecting mind structure theory to have quite as much math as it did.”

Snape nodded. “No one ever does. And you are certain you feel comfortable with me entering your mind?”

“To be honest, no, but if there is no better way then I’m willing to do it. I do trust you to keep what you see private, I just...”

Snape nodded gently. “Believe me, Harry, I know how difficult it is to allow someone else into your mind. It is our last line of defence, our most sacred, personal sanctuary. If there was a better way, I would not suggest this. But, practicing Occlumency without understanding your own natural state will lead to great harm in the long run, and can impede your progress at every step of the way. If you wish to keep your mind safe from intruders, then I will have to impose on you this once.”

Harry nodded. “I understand, sir.” He took a deep breath. “I’m ready,” he said, firmly this time.

To be honest, Harry was terrified. There were many things he wanted to keep hidden, the diary and all the things he’d discussed with Tom being top on his list. He had no idea where Snape’s true loyalties lay, and it was not really something he wanted to discuss quite yet. But having mind protections was crucial to being able to work with Voldemort, and putting it off would only result in more danger as time went on. He had to get it over with now, and then he would never have to worry about someone being able to read his mind without his permission, or at the very least his knowledge, ever again.

Snape approached him, sitting in the chair directly in front of Harry’s. “I will now perform Legilimency on you. I will try to be as gentle as possible, but I am not a Master Legilimens so this may feel...very strange.”

Harry wrung his hands nervously. “I understand.”

Snape drew his wand. “Close your eyes. Let your mind relax, let your magic relax. Don’t try to stop them from wandering, but don’t focus on any particular thought or feeling either. Just let yourself be.”

Harry nodded, doing his best to follow Snape’s instructions. It was naturally quite hard for Harry to relax fully, especially his mind. He was used to having his thoughts running wild at all times, analyzing and considering and theorizing, and just letting them *be* was very tricky.

But the days of quiet meditation had worked, and at this point he didn’t have too much trouble finding a gentle sort of pattern in his breathing that let him clear his mind in what felt like a natural, calm way, like a gentle breeze blowing leaves off the street.

“Legilimens.”

At first, Harry felt nothing.

Then, like a sudden stream of water flowing into his temples, he had the odd sensation that his head was being slowly infused with liquid, painlessly but firmly. It wasn’t exactly unpleasant but it was definitely unsettling, and Harry did his best to focus on his breathing, trying not to let his nerves get the best of him.

As the minutes trickled on, he began to wonder if everything was going well, or if Snape had found something unfortunate in his mind. He banished the thought quickly, not wanting to dwell on it, and once again let the soft inhale and exhale of his lungs lull him into calmness.

Twenty-something minutes later, Snape straightened in his chair, taking a deep breath and massaging his temples. Harry had been dozing off slightly, and was roused by the other's movement. "What did you find?"

Snape gave him a calculating look, and Harry felt a frisson of panic run through him.

"You are very good at hiding things," Snape stated finally. "It took me nearly ten minutes to even find all the structures I was looking for. Normally this entire process would take no more than four minutes, in someone your age with no training."

Harry released the breath he'd been holding. "But it looked good?"

Snape nodded. "I'll draw you the diagram."

Snape went back into his study, and came back out with a large parchment which he placed on his table, and began to draw. It took him the better part of an hour, during which Harry sat by patiently and sipped his tea.

Eventually, Snape pulled back with a groan. "That is the best I can do for now. I'll add more details later."

He took a long drink from his tea and then leaned back in. "Pay attention, now, we'll be starting with the main structures. This the simplest section, but also the most important to understand fully. Your Core Functions are spaced out around this area here," he said, pointing towards a circle near the center of the page, "and they align with the Pathway that travels down the middle of your natural state." He then gestured towards where he'd made various small hatch marks. "You will begin structuring your Foundations at these four intersections of the Twelve Minor Branches. As I'm sure you remember from the books I gave you this will help guide you when you enter the Structural Stage, as having access to the Branches is invaluable when attempting to Solidify." He turned to Harry with a pointed look. "I hope you feel sufficiently comfortable with smooth manifolds by now, because understanding their properties will make it much easier to build your Foundations properly from the very beginning."

Harry took in the huge, highly complicated diagram Snape had drawn with some trepidation. "Simplest section, he says." He wondered if this was what Blaise had felt like when Harry had tried to explain his magic to him.

Snape looked to him with some amusement. "Don't tell me geometric topology is where you draw the line."

Harry peered at him suspiciously, somewhat disbelieving. "Did you just make a math pun?"

"Nonsense," Snape replied with an almost invisible smirk. "Now, focus. The books I gave you are a great way to build up your knowledge, but individual minds are significantly more complex than the theory. Explaining your entire natural state will probably take a month and I do not want to waste any time."

Harry sighed, mentally preparing himself for what lay ahead. "Yes, sir. I'm ready."

The amount of times I've written dairy instead of diary = too many.
hashtagblaiseit except he isnt in this chapter at all rip

Thank you so much for all of your support with this story! Truly from the depths of my heart, thank you :) I appreciate each and every one of your comments and kudos so much, you are all incredibly lovely <3

I really hope you enjoyed this chapter!! Thank you for reading! <3

Fides

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Draco peered over Harry's shoulder, looking curiously at the book he'd been perusing for the better part of an hour.

"What are you looking for now?" he asked mildly, taking in the title. "Salazar Slytherin: The Greatest of the Hogwarts Four? A bit on the nose, don't you think?"

Harry snorted. "Well, given that I'm trying to find information about him specifically, it seemed appropriate."

"Anything in particular you're curious about? I've read some books about him, wanted to know as much as I could before coming to Hogwarts in case House selection included a Founder's quiz," Draco remarked dryly.

"Why doesn't that surprise me?"

"I'm offering my help, Potter, be thankful."

Harry's tone turned simpering. "Oh Draco, you are always ever so generous with your knowledge and time, how will I ever—"

"Alright, stop that," Draco interrupted, his expression a mix of amused and disturbed. "Just tell me what you're looking for."

Harry grinned at him, but inside he was feeling rather conflicted. The truth was, Harry *had* considered confiding in his friends. Not just about the Chamber, but also about his new plans to resurrect Voldemort and bring him back to power.

It was an idea he'd been considering since last year, when he'd found out from Dumbledore that not only was the Dark Lord not dead, but there were ways for the wraith to become fully human again. Obviously Dumbledore hadn't told him that, but he *had* told him that Voldemort had been going after the Philosopher's Stone. And, given that Harry knew that the Stone's capabilities involved in some way 'giving life', it felt fair to assume that the wraith's goal with it had been to, in some way, 'become alive' once more. Whether it would have actually worked Harry had no idea, but clearly the *intention* to resurrect itself was there. Which, of course, implied that it was at the very least possible in the first place, and his conversation with Tom had only solidified that conclusion. So Harry had decided that, for now, finding a way to resurrect Voldemort was his main goal.

Now, Harry knew that it was a little strange for him to want to resurrect the Dark Lord, for a variety of reasons.

If he had been anyone else, he probably would have hated Voldemort for what he'd done to Harry's parents, and all the other lives he had ruined in his insanity. But that was the thing; Voldemort had been *insane*, and as much harm as he had caused in the war Harry felt it was kind of irrational to hold his actions against him when everyone agreed that the man had been completely out of his mind at the time. And as far as personal vendettas went, yes, Harry probably would have lived a better life with his parents, but that was a circumstantial issue and not something that could be solved retroactively in any way so it didn't really make sense to him to feel upset about it at this point. It wasn't like he was trying to resurrect an *insane* Voldemort, so why care about what an

insane Voldemort had done?

Besides, if he *did* end up resurrecting a Voldemort that was still insane, it wasn't like Harry wouldn't be able to kill him with his magic. As long as he had enough time to plan and prepare, Harry was fairly sure he would be able to kill even someone as powerful as Dumbledore, so there really didn't seem to be anything to worry about when it came to a recently-resurrected Dark Lord that was completely out of his mind.

Now, the idea of killing someone wasn't one that Harry was necessarily *comfortable* with, but he felt like it was something he had to consider if he was thinking about bringing back someone who might come back completely insane *and* possibly extremely angry towards Harry specifically.

Twelve years seemed like a long time to hold a grudge, but Harry wasn't going to take any chances. Besides, he'd already 'killed' Voldemort once, and if he had to do it again then so be it. He didn't *want* to have to do that, but he was sure he would be able to if he really needed to, and that was all that really mattered.

That being said, Harry wouldn't have cared about resurrecting Voldemort at all, insane or not, if it hadn't been for the fact that as far as he could tell, having Voldemort on his side - a sane one - would make stopping the Ministry's current agenda and helping the Dark families almost...*too* easy. And, on the other hand, Harry doing it by himself would probably be unbearably awful *and* take a significantly longer amount of time.

Because the thing was, there were many issues with Harry trying to fix the Ministry's corruption and rampant social prejudices by himself.

The main one was that it would take Harry a long time to gain any kind of real rapport with any of the Dark families, partially because he was a child and partially because he had no real connections of his own at this point. Even with Draco's support he would still have to establish himself independently with Lucius, and the same went for all of his friends and *their* families. And after that he'd still have to establish himself with all of the the *other* Major Dark families, and then with everyone *else*, before he could even start to think about becoming a political candidate for anything.

That alone would take a significant amount of time, not to mention power, patience and, worst of all, years of dedicated socializing with people that Harry knew - *knew* - he would not like on a personal level in the least.

Even considering the best-case scenario where everything went according to plan and he didn't suffer any major setbacks, he was still looking at easily twenty years of exhausting work that he would no doubt detest every second of. And that was not even considering all the lobbying and pandering he'd have to do with members of the Ministry, which would no doubt be infinitely more soul-crushing than convincing all the Dark *and* Light families to support him would be.

All things considered, Harry wanted to avoid having to go down that route at all costs, which was precisely where the Dark Lord came in. Harry had researched the man quite a bit during the summer, and the results of his investigation had been incredibly promising.

Not even ten years after he'd first appeared, the Dark Lord had already been regarded as one of the most powerful, intelligent and influential politicians in Wizarding England, maybe even in all of Europe. This was certainly extremely impressive on its own, but it was the way he had achieved this that was particularly interesting to Harry.

Apart from his prodigious level of power and intelligence, everyone wrote of how the Dark Lord had been remarkably charismatic; both in private, intimate settings, and in more public spaces, with

larger crowds. He was commonly described as being magnetic, captivating, awe-inspiring and yet also humble and polite, an impeccably charming man who it had been impossible to dislike, even by the most ardent Light supremacists. He was well known for regularly arranging private meetings with powerful, notoriously difficult to sway Dark and Light Lords, and emerging from those meetings with them as devoted supporters.

He had even managed to become allies with all manners of creatures, many of which usually refused to come into contact with humans at all, let alone form alliances with them. If anything, it was hard to find anyone - or anything, for that matter - who *hadn't* supported him. Back then, everyone had *loved* him. Overall, it was clear to see that at the peak of his power Voldemort had been a truly unstoppable force who he had held the entirety of Wizarding Britain in the palm of his hand, and could easily have pushed for the changes that Harry wanted to implement. And the thing was, Harry had no doubt that that influence *still* remained, as much as the Ministry had tried its best to pretend it didn't.

The Dark Lord's political impact on their society had simply been too powerful to erase, and even now the effects of it were rather obvious if one knew where to look.

Creatures now demanded more rights; Dark and Light families began honoring long-lost traditions again; established Muggleborns wanted to know why they *hadn't* been helped upon their introduction to Hogwarts. All things that seemed minor on the surface, but were key elements of the Dark Lord's ideology and hadn't really existed before now; and the thing was, those were all relatively public issues that Harry had learned about simply from reading the newspapers. Who knew what else was going on behind the scenes? How much of the Dark Lord's influence was entrenched into everyone's minds, really? Even after the war, even after he'd been gone for a decade? More, even, if one considered that he'd begun acting...*strange*...almost ten years before his 'death'? Really, it was fairly obvious to Harry that most of the hatred that people openly displayed for him now was mostly due to a mixture of propaganda and fear of opposing the Ministry directly.

Of course almost no one had still genuinely supported the Dark Lord at the end, but pretending like they'd *never* supported him would have been a clearly hypocritical and frankly ridiculous position for most, if not all, of the Major Families to be taking now if it wasn't because they were clearly being strongly motivated by the current Ministry to do just that.

As such, Harry was convinced that, as terrible as Voldemort's insanity had been, if he returned sane and 'good' once more it would take minimal convincing for all of the Dark families to join him again, and probably not much more for some, if not most, of the Light ones as well. Even if a particular family no longer believed in him after what he'd done in the war, someone who was regarded so highly by so many was still not someone they could afford to offend, that anyone would ever *want* to offend even if they held a personal grudge. Everyone knew what the Dark Lord had been capable of achieving as a politician back then, and his return would be regarded by many as a second chance to gain his favor before he undoubtedly became so powerful that his favor was nearly impossible to gain anymore.

Harry wasn't even worried about the Ministry interfering in any of this, either; at the peak of his power Voldemort had been completely untouchable, and not even the Minister himself would be able to stop the Dark Lord's rise once he had even a small fraction of his previous supporters and influence back. And with adequate use of secrecy and the careful employment of the insanity defense - which Harry was sure *many* people would be more than willing to vouch for - the Ministry would not have enough time to step in before that crucial point was reached.

Really, as long as Voldemort cooperated with him, Harry didn't even see *how* this plan could fail.

Which meant that Harry wanted to resurrect Voldemort for two main reasons: the first reason, and the most important one as far as Harry was concerned, was that having Voldemort as his 'face' meant that Harry wouldn't have to do any of the socializing or schmoozing necessary to be a successful politician himself. As much as he wanted to help the Dark and stop the Ministry's sheer idiocy, Harry wasn't entirely sure that he was willing to subject himself to that level of torture for multiple decades to achieve it.

Harry had initially planned to use one of his friends in this position, but they just weren't as good an option as Voldemort would be, because with them Harry would still have to make use of his status as the Boy-Who-Lived to help sway a lot of the Light families; which meant, of course, Harry himself socializing.

Meanwhile, Voldemort wouldn't *need* his interference at all; he'd done it before without him, after all. Therefore, this first reason really was a crucial one to Harry, as much as he knew other people - his friends, mostly - might make fun of him for it.

The second reason, which actually combined nicely with the first one, was that with Voldemort on his side, Harry would have all the support he needed to make real changes within, at most, a few years.

That meant that even if Harry *did* have to still be involved with the social aspects of his plan, he'd at least only have to do it for a fraction of the time. Furthermore, achieving a significant amount of power quickly meant that the Ministry wouldn't be able to move ahead with their own plans quite as easily, and so Harry would have a much higher chance of being able to fix this entire mess before another war began.

Because Harry was sure that if he took too long with all of this, another war *would* happen; it was simple the obvious resolution to all the hatred and aggression that the Ministry was fostering and relentlessly pushing towards. With that in mind, if a second war did end up being inevitable in spite of Harry's best efforts to prevent it, Harry at least wanted to ensure that the Dark came out on top this time. And with the Dark Lord's power on his side, that too would be infinitely easier to achieve. The Dark Lord had been winning the last war almost single-handedly, *and* he'd been completely insane at that time; the only thing that had been able to stop him was, ironically enough, Harry.

But with his faculties intact and the addition of Harry's own unique power to his side, for him to lose a war against the Ministry just seemed...*exceedingly* unlikely.

In other words, Harry *really* wanted to succeed in bringing a sane Voldemort back. Which, for now, meant that he was truly invested in making sure *Tom's* plan to resurrect him succeeded.

With that in mind, while Harry had considered confiding in one of his friends about the diary and his plans to bring back the Dark Lord - in particular, Blaise, since he already knew about Harry's magic - in the end he had decided against it because there was no way anyone his age had the proper mental defenses to even be *able* to keep something like this a secret, and he didn't want to do anything that might put his plans at risk. He was probably being overly paranoid - Snape had told him that people who could even cast Legilimens in the first place were very rare, so the chances that it would be cast on any of them while at Hogwarts were exceedingly low - but Harry was perfectly fine with being a little paranoid if it kept him out of Azkaban. He had no delusions about what would happen to him if the Ministry somehow got wind that he was actively attempting to bring Voldemort back. Even if he somehow managed to convince everyone that he had just been manipulated or brainwashed or something like that, his credibility as a supporter of the Dark would then be decimated, and all of his future plans would be made infinitely harder. Especially now,

when everything was so tentative, he just couldn't risk telling any of his friends anything too suspicious.

But just being curious about Salazar Slytherin wasn't particularly notable for someone as notoriously curious as Harry, so he just shrugged at Draco's question. "Nothing in particular, to be honest. I just wanted to see if there was any interesting rumors about him, or if there was anything fun he'd left behind at Hogwarts. Some kind of Slytherin Family heirloom, or a library, or even just a random room but, you know," he lowered his voice into a stage whisper, "secret."

Draco hummed thoughtfully. "Well, there *are* rumors about him having had a secret library full of illegal Dark books, but no one's ever been able to find it. It's also assumed he had his personal quarters somewhere near the Slytherin Common Room, but again, unknown location."

"Makes sense," Harry said, carefully showing interest that didn't seem too excited.

"As for rumors, some people say he had a ton of snakes as pets, and they could often be found if you went down into the dungeons," Draco continued, his brows knitting, "but I always wondered if that was just a misconception about the various snake statues around here."

"What are you guys talking about?" Blaise said, walking up to the pair from the entrance to the Common Room. "Snake statues?"

"Harry was looking up fancy secrets about our House's Founder," Draco replied. "I was just telling him about all the snakes he was rumored to have, but I think it's all fake."

"What about the basilisk?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "Blaise, there was no *basilisk*. That's a load of bollocks, and you know it."

"It could be true. Couldn't Salazar talk to snakes?"

"That doesn't mean he could talk to a *basilisk*. Basilisks are ancient mythical creatures similar to dragons, they aren't just large snakes. And besides, even if he could talk to them that doesn't make a basilisk any less dangerous! One look and it kills you, you really think he would have that as a pet just walking around?"

"Well, not walking, but-"

"Very funny, you know what I mean."

"Maybe he just kept it locked up in his office?"

"Yes, Blaise, he kept a 50 meter long, colossal basilisk in his *office*. Just put him in a little cage in the corner, fed it a nice little rabbit every week."

"You've never seen his office! It could be *huge*."

"You're being ridiculous, I don't know why I put up with you," Draco drawled, crossing his arms in front of his chest with a haughty air.

Blaise gave a long-suffering sigh as he sat down next to Harry on the couch, who had gone back to reading his book as soon as the other two had started bickering. "Do you hear this, Harry? The injustice."

Harry nodded absently. "The humanity."

“You aren’t even listening to me,” Blaise said with a pout, and he poked at Harry’s cheek. Harry jumped back reflexively, and Draco burst out into laughter.

Harry turned and shot Blaise a half-hearted glare, embarrassed by his overreaction mostly because it had been in front of Draco. Blaise merely grinned at him. “You know, darling, you’d make a great basilisk.”

Harry huffed, pretending to be annoyed even as he grinned at the dark-haired boy. “Why’s that?”

“You’ve got the death glare down pat,” Blaise smirked. “Speaking of which, Survival 101; if you ever run into a basilisk, go for the eyes.”

Harry frowned. “I thought the eyes were the most dangerous part?”

Draco shook his head. “Blaise is right, actually. Basilisks are widely known for their offensive capabilities, but they are also incredibly strong defensively. Their scales are immune to pretty much any kind of magic; as long as the mouth is closed, the only truly vulnerable part of their body is their eyes. They are a basilisk’s main weapon, but also their main weak point, since if you can damage their eyes they won’t be able to see or kill you with them.”

Blaise instantly turned to Harry, his magic flickering with amusement. “Your eyes are *my* weak point,” he teased with a wide grin, and Harry shook his head at how pleased Blaise looked with himself for making that joke.

“Thank you both for your contributions to my research,” he said only *slightly* sarcastically, and went back to his book. “I’m sure this will all come in very handy in the future.”

Draco snorted. “Sure it will. Let me know if you find Slytherin’s secret library, there might be some good books in there.”

“Of course I will,” Harry lied.

To be perfectly honest, part of Harry still doubted Tom. The memory had been convincing, absolutely, but the more Harry thought about it, the more far-fetched it all seemed. A sink in the girl’s lavatory? A library that contained books written by Slytherin himself? A plan to resurrect Voldemort, without him still being insane? It all sounded too good to be true - or not necessarily good, but convenient? conveniently weird? definitely weird, especially the whole lavatory situation - and part of Harry wondered if he was just being led into a really strange, really convoluted joke.

It didn’t really seem to be Tom’s style, though. Harry had been talking to him quite a lot during the past few weeks, and although he wouldn’t exactly say he and the other boy had become *friends* - it was fairly clear to Harry that Tom didn’t really trust him, and he didn’t really trust Tom either - they’d established a rapport that was at the very least friendly.

The thing was, Tom was *smart*. Although he was extremely private about his past and his plans for resurrecting Voldemort, he was rather willing to be open about pretty much any other subject that Harry thought to bring up with him. When he’d told Harry that there were ‘very few things he could not provide some assistance with’, he really *hadn’t* been lying; so far there hadn’t been any questions that Harry had brought up to Tom that he hadn’t known the answer to, or at the very least where an answer could be found. But that wasn’t what had convinced Harry of Tom’s brilliance.

The thing was, Harry had noticed was that some of Tom's knowledge was outdated - that was hardly something that could be held against him, obviously, Tom *was* a memory from fifty years ago. But, if Harry corrected him, Tom would absorb that information and, almost instantly, from it draw a wide variety of conclusions about how it affected other outdated knowledge that had Harry feeling downright awed, because it showed exactly how much Tom *understood* what he was talking about. It was one thing to know that, given that chicken teeth had been discovered to possess healing properties when mixed with knotgrass, it would probably also have those properties with lavender. It was another thing entirely to realize that that meant that chicken teeth would also have healing properties when mixed with *boomslang skin*, because according to Tom the main reason knotgrass worked was that it mildly acidified the chicken teeth when heated properly, and minor amounts of boomslang skin would achieve the same effect. And the thing was, it wasn't that the idea of using boomslang skin to acidify a component in a potion was unheard of or revolutionary; it was simply that Tom had reached that conclusion almost instantly, and reached at least ten more like it within moments. Harry hadn't even realized it was happening until he'd asked Tom whether what Harry had told him affected other knowledge he had, and Tom had been kind enough to let him know that it *did*, as a matter of fact; here, have some twenty examples I just came up with!

Harry had gotten the distinct impression that Tom was still feeling rather petty about Harry having implied he was stupid the first time they'd talked. Which, knowing Tom as he did now, Harry had to admit was a frankly hilarious misunderstanding on his part. Tom had probably never been called stupid in his *life*.

All that being said, they still weren't friends, and Harry still didn't *fully* trust Tom. Yes, he trusted Tom enough that he was almost certain that there really was a Chamber filled with Slytherin's books - and if Tom was lying about that then Harry really had to commend him, the sheer nostalgia in his descriptions alone was enough to convince Harry it existed - but that didn't mean that Harry wanted to go into this without as much knowledge as possible. Which, for Harry, meant finding at least one other source of information on the subject, completely separate from Tom.

Unfortunately, there was almost no other source of information on the Chamber available to Harry. The library didn't have any books about it, or at least none that didn't treat it like it was just a myth, and Harry was fairly certain that none of the other students would know anything more than Draco and Blaise did.

It was ironic that his most likely option for information was actually Dumbledore, since he'd shown up in Tom's memory. But obviously, there was no way Harry could bring up the subject with him without raising suspicion, even indirectly. Harry still shivered when he thought back to how cold Dumbledore had been towards Tom in the memory, and if Tom's knowledge of the Chamber was the reason for the antipathy, well, Harry had no intentions of bringing it upon himself as well. Tom refused to talk about Dumbledore at all and got rather upset when Harry tried to bring it up, and in the end Harry had decided to avoid the topic completely if only to keep his relationship with Tom civil.

Which was where the new Defense Professor, Horace Slughorn, came in. According to Draco, he used to be the Head of Slytherin and had taught Potions at Hogwarts for nearly 50 years before retiring in 1981. Harry had wondered briefly why Dumbledore had chosen another Potions Master to teach Defense instead of choosing someone specialized in the course, but from the rumors Draco had heard, there were almost no applicants for the position and Dumbledore had been forced to use alternatives. As it turned out, even though Slughorn hadn't been the Defense Professor back in the day, he knew quite a lot about the subject and of course had a lot of experience being a teacher, so he ended up being an excellent replacement.

Most importantly, and the reason Harry had decided to seek him out, was that his dates of previous employment at Hogwarts meant Slughorn had been a Professor while Tom was a student, and had therefore been present at the school at the time the memory had taken place. In addition, as someone who had been Head of Slytherin and thus also a Slytherin himself, he was both more likely to know about the Chamber *and* significantly less likely to consider Harry's question particularly suspicious than most of the other Professors who'd also been teaching at that time, like McGonagall or Binns. Compared to what many Slytherins got up to, Harry's curiosity was fairly innocent.

So Harry had decided to stay and talk to Slughorn after class, telling Draco to go on without him. The blond, used to his somewhat mysterious behavior at this point, had merely frowned slightly before leaving with everyone else.

"Sir, do you mind if I ask you a few questions?" he asked after everyone else had left.

Slughorn had moved to his desk by that point, sitting down with a heavy sigh and shifting his papers around to reorganize them. He looked up at Harry's questions, seemingly only then realizing he was still there.

In Harry's opinion, Slughorn was a rather interesting teacher. He was prone to singling out students he liked, and ignoring the rest, and as soon as Harry had realized this he'd done his level best to lay low in the class, and not stand out too much in one way or the other. He'd been worried initially that his fame as the Boy-Who-Lived would be enough to gain him Slughorn's unwanted attention, but after a few weeks it had become clear that Slughorn would only really have cared about his title if Harry did. An example of this was Draco, who flaunted his title as the Heir to the Malfoy Family and was therefore treated as such by their Professor. But Harry never mentioned his fame and never stood out in class, and as such Slughorn mostly ignored him unless Harry spoke to him first. Which as far as Harry was concerned was ideal, so he actually quite liked his Defense Professor.

"Of course, Mr. Potter. Are you having any difficulties in the class?"

"No, sir. It's something unrelated to Defense."

Slughorn raised his eyebrows. "Well, then," he said, "is it about Potions?" Word had gotten around that Slughorn was a Potions Master, and Harry knew that some of the students who were afraid of Snape had decided to come to him for advice on occasion, so it made sense that he'd assume that's what Harry was after.

"No sir, it's unrelated to Potions as well."

Slughorn just looked confused now. "Go on. I don't know if I can be of help but I'm happy to listen." He began to look through the papers in front of him, somewhat dismissive but not so much that it came across as particularly rude. Harry didn't mind at all; it was actually ideal that Slughorn didn't seem too interested in what Harry had to ask, since it meant there was less chances of him thinking anything about his questions was suspicious.

Harry was silent for a few more seconds, taking a moment to mentally go over the excuse he'd come up with to bring up the Chamber without sounding too suspicious.

"Sir, have you ever heard anything about a secret Chamber that Slytherin would have built in Hogwarts?" he asked, as casually as possible.

Slughorn paused in his perusing of the page in front of him, and brought his eyes up to meet Harry's. "That's a very interesting question Mr. Potter," Slughorn said after a few seconds, with a

calculating gleam in his eyes, “on a topic I haven’t thought about in, oh, fifty years?”

Harry’s eyebrows rose. “That’s a long time, sir,” he said, somewhat awkwardly, in his attempt to hide his excitement at the fact that Slughorn clearly *did* know something.

Slughorn huffed out indignantly. “Youngsters these days, no respect.”

“My apologies, sir,” Harry said, making sure his tone was sweet and faintly awed. He’d noticed Slughorn reacted very positively to praise - mostly because Harry was the complete opposite - and he was glad to have that knowledge now. He certainly didn’t want Slughorn to send him away with no new information due to Harry’s thoughtless comment. “I meant no disrespect. I’m very impressed by how long you’ve been at Hogwarts. I’m honored to have the chance to have you as my teacher.”

Slughorn puffed up at his flattery. “I *am* one of the teachers who has taught here the longest. I was always well-regarded, even in my younger years. I used to be the Potions Professor, as I’m sure you’ve heard, but now they need me as the Defense Professor, and I’m willing to face the challenge.”

Harry smiled at him, somewhat surprised the flattery had worked *that* well. Well, in for a penny in for a pound. “I’m really enjoying our classes with you, sir. You’re an amazing Defense Professor, and I’m sure you were excellent in Potions as well.”

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Potter. You are too kind,” Slughorn chuckled. “Now, what was your question again?”

“I was just wondering if you knew anything about a Chamber that Slytherin might have built in secret in Hogwarts. I was talking about it with my friends and we thought he might have left some relics or interesting books behind, and I was hoping you’d know something about that. After all, you know so many things!” Was there such a thing as too much flattery for Slughorn? Harry was willing to find out.

Slughorn frowned thoughtfully. “Well, Mr. Potter, I must disappoint you. I do not know anything about a secret relic, or books of any kind.” Harry frowned, but then Slughorn continued “-but there was an incident many years ago that involved someone called the ‘Heir of Slytherin’ and there were rumors going around of a place called the Chamber of Secrets.”

Harry felt his pulse spike. This was it.

“Could you tell me what happened, sir?” he asked, as calmly as he could.

Slughorn considered him carefully. “Are you sure you want to know? It was a truly terrible affair, fraught with peril. I wouldn’t want to scare you.”

Harry nodded slowly. “If you don’t mind, sir. I’m curious about the Founder of my House, and this sounds like something really interesting. I won’t be scared, I promise.”

Slughorn gave him a small smile, then nodded gravely. “Very well, then, how can I deny a young, curious mind?” He sighed. “The story is rather strange, to be honest, and even I am not really clear on the details. But one day, out of nowhere, a student was found petrified in the castle. No one knew who’d done it, or why. As weeks went by, more and more students suffered a similar fate. And, eventually,” he frowned deeply, “a student was killed.”

Harry gasped. “Killed? But, what was happening?”

Slughorn shook his head. "No one really knew, and no one knew how to stop it, either. Our only clue was a message that had been found that claimed the Chamber of Secrets had been opened, and that someone called the 'Heir of Slytherin' was behind the attacks. We all tried our hardest to figure out who it was, but to no avail. Finally, when the student was killed the Ministry intervened, and they said the school would have to close for the students' safety if the culprit wasn't found."

"Were they caught in the end?"

Slughorn nodded. "Thankfully, yes. The culprit turned out to be Rubeus Hagrid, actually; he had been keeping an *acromantula* as a *pet*, can you imagine?" He shook his head disbelievingly. "Acromantula are extremely dangerous, so as horrible as it is to say, we were actually extremely lucky that only one student was killed. Thankfully an antidote was eventually found for the petrified students, so they all ended up being fine, but even so they still lost months of their lives to the petrification." He sighed. "In the end, Dumbledore kept Hagrid from Azkaban out of pity, insisting the boy had no idea what had been happening, and that his acromantula had been escaping and attacking students without his knowledge. It was also found that another student had written the message as a prank, back when no one had realized that the issue was that serious, so the idea that it had all been a terrible accident wasn't hard to believe. As such, Hagrid was pardoned under the condition that he remained under Dumbledore's supervision for his and others' safety." He shook his head. "That boy may not have meant to hurt anyone, but he caused us all a lot of grief with his thoughtlessness. An acromantula as a pet, what nonsense!"

"How did they figure out it was him?" Harry asked, curious in spite of himself. "If no one knew what was happening?"

Slughorn nodded. "Oh, yes, that was all thanks to Mr. Riddle. He was the Slytherin Prefect at the time, and he was able to figure it all out and bring it to a stop. A brilliant boy, he was. A pity what happened to him."

Harry felt his heart stutter in his chest. "Riddle, sir? Who was that?"

Slughorn's eyebrows scrunched together. "Ah, Tom Riddle. I haven't thought about him in decades. He was one of the brightest young men Hogwarts had ever seen, a true prodigy in magic and incredibly powerful. He had a flair for politics, and we all expected him to work for the Ministry, perhaps even eventually become Minister himself." He shook his head. "But right after graduating from Hogwarts he took a job at a small shop and then disappeared, off to travel the world for more knowledge I suppose. I haven't heard of him since." He sighed again. "A true pity; we all expected great things from him, but perhaps it was all too much and he just ran away."

Harry kept his face carefully calm, not letting his whirling thoughts appear on the surface.

"Thank you for telling me about the Chamber, sir," Harry said, carefully steering the subject back to his initial question. "It sounds dangerous, so I won't look into it any further."

Slughorn nodded. "A wise decision, Mr. Potter. No one knows if the Chamber is real or not, but there are plenty of other mysteries in the castle that are not tied to such tragedy. I agree that this one is best left alone."

"Yes, sir. Thank you for your time. Goodnight," Harry bid his farewells and left the classroom, his thoughts in turmoil.

He reached the Slytherin Common Room quickly, and slipped into his room before Draco noticed him and asked about his meeting with Slughorn. He pulled out the diary from his trunk, brought it to his bed, drew the curtains and set up his usual privacy spells.

<Tom?>

<<Yes, what is it?>>

Well, time to come clean about the fact that he'd been trying to find information about the Chamber.

<I had an interesting conversation with one of my Professors about you.>

Tom's magic froze. <<You told someone about me?>> It was clear he thought Harry had mentioned the diary itself to someone, and Harry couldn't help but roll his eyes at Tom's reaction. Did he really think Harry was stupid enough to just bring suspicions upon both of them like that?

<Not exactly. I asked someone about the Chamber, out of curiosity, and they mentioned how you saved the school from closing back in the day.>

Tom was quiet for a few seconds, and Harry wondered if he had angered Tom even further by telling him that. The diary's magic didn't *look* angry anymore, but it was hard for Harry to pick apart its nuances sometimes. He'd thought he knew Tom reasonably well by now, but it had truly surprised him to learn that the other boy had risked his life to save Hogwarts back then, especially since it had been from a dangerous creature who'd already killed another student. Tom had certainly never mentioned it before.

<<The incident with Hagrid, you mean?>>

<Yes. It's crazy that he had an acromantula as a pet. How did you figure out it was him?>

<<It wasn't too difficult when I really thought about it. For one, I knew it had nothing to do with the Chamber because there's nothing in there that could even harm someone, much less kill a student. On the other hand, Hagrid was well known for always trying to have dangerous pets with him, so he was a relatively obvious choice as a suspect.>>

<If it was so obvious, why didn't you stop it sooner?>

<<I didn't do anything at first because I expected the Professors would be able to handle it. I wasn't exactly *eager* to investigate a creature that had killed someone, but when I heard the school would have to close if the culprit wasn't found I realized I had to do something.>>

<You're right, of course, no student should have had to step in at all. And if you hadn't discovered the Chamber earlier you would have been just as lost as everyone else.>

<<Exactly. I was just lucky to be in the right place at the right time.>>

<What happened to the acromantula?>

<<Unfortunately I was unable to kill it, and it escaped into the Forbidden Forest.>>

Harry frowned. <Could it still be alive?>

<<Most likely. Acromantula can live for hundreds of years, and they are also excellent predators. I would expect, if anything, that it has thrived.>>

Harry suppressed a shiver.

<Well, thank you for helping keep the school open and safe from dangerous creatures.>

Tom's magic flicked at him in a way that Harry had come to associate with amusement, but he wasn't sure what Tom would be amused by in this situation.

<<No need to thank me. I was only doing what was necessary.>>

Harry blinked at Tom's response. From their very first conversation, Harry had considered Tom as someone who was - although perhaps not strictly *arrogant*, since it did really seem like he was as brilliant as he presented himself to be - clearly not humble in the least. But Tom saying something like this made Harry feel fairly guilty about having just assumed that about the other boy's character without really knowing him at all, and he resolved to be nicer to Tom in the future.

<Still, I'm thanking you anyways. Now, about what we were discussing the other day...>

The break arrived quickly after that, and Harry was soon one of the few students left in the castle. Draco had offered to stay behind so Harry wouldn't be alone, but Harry had insisted that his parents would miss him terribly, and he didn't want to be blamed for keeping Draco away from them. On Christmas, he received gifts from his friends and, once again to his surprise, Snape.

Most of his gifts were books, once again, but this time they were suspiciously coordinated. Draco had sent him a book on the history of Dark politics, Blaise on the history of Dark Magic, and Daphne on Pureblood manners. On the other hand, Pansy had sent him a specialized hair-gel that touted 'Max-Strength Hold'. Harry was fairly sure that they were all making fun of him, at least a little bit, but he appreciated the gifts regardless. They hadn't had to send him anything, after all. He'd also sent them all books which he'd hoped would align with their interests. He'd never gotten anyone gifts before, and he wasn't really sure what would be appropriate, but he'd tried his best; in any case, they were all aware he'd never celebrated Christmas before, so Harry knew they would all cut him a lot of slack even if he did make a mistake. Meanwhile, Snape had sent him a book on Occlumency, with an old picture of his mother sitting by a lake and a note that stated that Harry's present to Snape be that he promised to sleep and eat well. It made Harry snort as he read it, a warm feeling in his chest at the sentiment.

That night, he set out to the girl's lavatory.

He left the dormitory late, making sure that everyone else who was also staying at the castle during the Holidays was completely asleep. The only thing he'd brought along with him was the diary; this was a scouting trip more than anything, and if Harry did indeed end up finding the Chamber he'd simply come back later with a bag to store things in. He reached the lavatory at around midnight, having taken his time to make sure that there was no chance anyone had seen him on the way. Even if he was using *Effugiat*, it would not do for a random student who was also out after dark to notice something was off. Once there, he pried open the door to the lavatory and slipped in carefully, casting a silencing ward around the area to make sure no noise escaped. It was obvious just from how hard the door was to open was that no one had been in this room in years.

Once inside, Harry couldn't help but notice that the lavatory looked almost exactly the way it had in Tom's memory, which was odd considering that was fifty years ago. But allegedly the bathroom had been abandoned and out of service for decades, and clearly no one had bothered to try and fix it. The situation was extremely strange, as far as Harry was concerned, but he wasn't the Hogwarts maintenance crew, so what did he know? Was there even a maintenance crew? What would happen if one of the other bathrooms broke down? Would it also just become abandoned for no reason? He

really hoped not, that sounded rather inconvenient. At least this bathroom being out of service made sneaking into it much easier, since Harry didn't have to be worried that any girls might suddenly decide to use it while he was here. Not that he expected they would have, anyways; it was midnight and every House had lavatories within the Dorms, but the added certainty was nice anyways.

He slowly approached the sink, carefully inspecting the handles for the one with a small snake engraving. It took him a few tries to find it; it was smaller than he remembered from the memory, more faded. But it was still very clearly a snake, and very conspicuous in its location.

"Alright, time to see if Tom's just been playing a prank on me all this time," Harry muttered, taking in a deep breath. He hadn't really felt uneasy about this whole plan so far, but now that the sink was in front of him, he could feel his nerves start to flare.

§Open§ he said, carefully focusing on the snake as Tom had instructed him to.

For a moment, nothing happened, and Harry seriously began to doubt Tom's intentions. But then, abruptly, the sink moved.

The entire circular assortment of sinks moved in fact, suddenly pulling forwards and towards Harry as one, and he hurriedly stumbled backwards to put a few feet of distance between himself and the sinks.

Then, just as suddenly, they stopped moving.

Harry narrowed his eyes at the porcelain; Tom *had* mentioned they would do that, but the event was much more alarming to witness in person than he'd expected. Then, his eyes caught onto the area in the middle of the circle.

A deep, dark hole had been revealed, an opening that Harry soon realized was the mouth of a giant pipe, stretching downwards and then bending into the darkness such that any observer in Harry's place would have no idea how deep it went.

He peered into it dubiously for a few seconds before pulling the diary out of his pocket. He then reached back in only to let out a hiss of annoyance.

"I can't believe I didn't think to bring a quill," he muttered, putting the diary back carefully. He'd wanted to ask Tom if there was a way to go down that involved something other than just sliding down the pipe, since from what he could see, the pipe had clearly not been cleaned for as long as the bathroom had been abandoned, and it was lined in muck, damp and grimy. He also had no idea if it opened at the bottom, and would simple drop him from a dangerous height, or if it would gently set him down like a child's water-slide. In any case, Tom hadn't really talked about the pipe that much, and so Harry had just assumed it wouldn't be an issue. But staring at the gaping maw of its entrance was more daunting than Harry had really expected the initial part of this journey to be.

But then again, it was clearly Harry's fault for underestimating how unnerving the whole situation would be for him the first time. The Chamber was a huge secret stored underneath the castle's dungeons that had been created hundreds and hundreds of years ago; what exactly had he been expecting the route to it would be like? A nice stroll down a clean and well maintained staircase, lined with pretty pink flowers and maybe a snake statue or two? The fact that there even was an entrance to it from the castle was already convenient [weird] enough. He should probably be thankful he wasn't outside *digging*.

Harry sighed, bringing his hand over the frames of his glasses and carefully casting *Gluten* on the

edges to make sure they stayed in place. It was the spell he used during Flying Classes to keep his glasses from flying off his face - a joke Blaise had made when he'd told him about the trick - and he imagined it would be a good idea to use it now. He also used it on the edges of his cloak's pocket, to make sure the diary didn't fall out either.

"I can't believe I'm doing this. Slytherin's books had better be worth it," Harry muttered grumpily, his features twisting in disgust at the stench he could also detect wafting from the hole. He layered on *Obice* all over his body like a magical layer of cellophane, and after a moment of deliberation also cast *Tegmentum*, just in case. Then, he came to stand at the edge of the pipe.

"*Cogito ergo moriar*," he muttered, and jumped in.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the wall of text explaining Harry's reasoning to bring voldy back. It's crucial to a lot of the story, and i'd always rather do too much explaining than too little.

<3

Things start getting a little wild from here on out, I hope ya'll are ready for it.

edit: haha forgot to add that bit about what harry would do if voldy did come back
insane. my brain, where does it go sometimes

Thank you so much for all of your support! Your comments are a delight, I really love reading them and seeing what you guys think is going on/will happen/want to happen :D

I really hope you enjoyed this chapter, thank you for reading <3

<3

Latin Trans:

Cogito ergo moriar: this is a bilingual malaphor/mixed metaphor/joke that i consider pretty indicative of harry's character, so I wanted to explain it in a bit more detail than usual :D

- 'Cogito ergo sum' is a famous phrase by Rene Descartes that literally translates to 'I think therefore I am', but actually means something more like 'the proof that I exist is that I can question whether I exist', or somewhat more colloquially 'questioning things is how I exist'.

- So while 'Cogito ergo moriar' literally translates to 'I think therefore I will die', what Harry actually means by it is 'questioning things is how i will die' or 'my curiosity will get me killed'.

- **TLDR:** cogito ergo moriar = i think therefore i will die = my curiosity will get me killed = cogito ergo sum (I think therefore I am) + i'm dying of curiosity/curiosity killed the cat

Thank you for reading :D

Proditione

Chapter Notes

General Warnings PSA:

Please note that from this chapter onward there will be 'graphic violence/disturbing themes'-related things happening on occasion, including gore and death and near-death experiences, as well as a lot of Harry's thoughts on those topics. To clarify, though, none of the untagged major archive warnings apply to this story. Just keep in mind this fic is labelled mature for a reason, and it's not a sexy one ;)

~~~~~

That being said, this story isn't really that dark at its core. We're here for a violent/disturbing/morally ambiguous time, not a sad time :D

*That* being said, this chapter in particular is fairly dark. You have been warned. And with all that out of the way, please enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### Proditione | Betrayal

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Harry slid down the pipe, winding and weaving for a good while before he emerged out the other side, falling on damp stone that did nothing to cushion the blow. He felt his ankle twist slightly at the impact, and he rubbed it to soothe the pain. Standing, he brushed off his cloak, pleased to note that *Obice* had kept it from becoming dirty from the trip down. The pipe had been exactly as disgusting as it had looked.

“Well, that was fun.” He looked back up the exit of the pipe. “I wonder how far down I am?”

More to the point, he was starting to wonder how he’d get back up. But, he supposed he’d deal with that when the time came to leave.

“*Illuminare.*”

Harry began to walk down the tunnel, which was thankfully only going in one direction. He didn’t really expect to get lost, and Tom *had* told him the Chamber would be very easy to find, so he wasn’t too worried.

Eventually, he came upon a giant, solid wall, on which two entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great, glinting emeralds. Harry wondered for a moment if he had somehow made a mistake, somewhere, turned into a dead end. But the snakes seemed too obvious a feature, too distinctive in the featureless tunnel he’d been traversing this whole time.

He peered at the wall, suspicious. Tom had told him to speak to the door as he had to the sink in the bathroom. This had to be the entrance.

§Open.§

For a moment, nothing happened; then, the wall suddenly parted in the middle, and each half retreated seamlessly into the surrounding rock.

Harry went inside.

He found himself standing at the end of a long, dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars entwined with more serpents rose to a ceiling lost in darkness, lining a pathway that lead to what appeared to be a giant stone statue of an old man's face. For a moment, Harry found himself frozen in awe, half-disbelieving that he'd actually, truly managed to find the fabled Chamber of Secrets and that it really *hadn't* been a joke.

His footsteps echoed on the stone floor as he walked down the passage, noting with vague interest that the sides of the Chamber were filled with shallow water. He wondered if that was by design or if the Chamber had simply flooded after centuries of disuse; it was a bit of a sad thought, that a place as majestic and filled with history as this one would be reduced to a mere flooded basement, and part of Harry wanted to come back later to see if he could help repair the Chamber in some way. The torches caught his attention as he walked. He hadn't noticed them turning on, or being set aflame by anything, which meant that they had been lit before he'd entered the Chamber. He wondered if they had been spelled to be self-fueling or if they were some kind of 'eternal flame'; either option would be interesting. Creating an infinite supply of anything was obviously impossible as far as Harry was concerned, but a fire that didn't use fuel was also very strange. After a few minutes he finally reached the end of the pathway, and he stopped a few feet away from the large, stone face.

Harry considered it for a moment. "Is this what he was talking about?"

Tom had told him that once inside the Chamber, he'd find a large statue of Salazar Slytherin. Harry would then have to take the diary and place it against the stone, and allow Tom to take some of his magic. Tom would then use his magic to activate the statue, which would then allow them entrance into Slytherin's secret office. It all sounded a bit convoluted to Harry, and he had no idea how Tom knew this would work, but so far Tom had known what he was talking about so there wasn't really any point in doubting him about this specifically.

Given that he couldn't see any other human statues in the room, Harry figured this *must* be Salazar Slytherin's statue. He brought out the diary and placed it against the statue's nose, and almost instantly Tom's magic clamped onto his. For a moment nothing happened. Then, suddenly, the diary surged with power.

From it came Tom Riddle's voice, cloaked in Harry's magic and echoing in the silence of the Chamber. *§Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four. Oh and, Harry? Say hi to the basilisk for me.§*

Harry frowned, too stunned by the fact that the diary had just *spoken* to pay significant attention to the words he'd said.

"What kind of joke-"

All of a sudden, the giant statue in front of him started to move, and Harry quickly stuffed the diary back in his pocket right as its mouth opened to reveal a large cavern within. The light from the torches around the Chamber barely penetrated the entrance, rendering the rest as a featureless void.

Through the shadow cast by the mouth, deep within the cavern, Harry could see movement and, within moments, a gigantic form began to take shape in the darkness. Its enormous body slowly uncoiled, the scales catching on the dim light; a vivid, poisonous green gleam.

*Say hi to the basilisk for me.*

Harry immediately turned and ran for the exit, not sparing an instant to confirm whether it *really* was a basilisk. He'd rather never find out, all things considered. Behind him, he could hear the slick slide of scales on the stone floor, and before he managed to reach the halfway point to the entrance to the Chamber he suddenly saw, out of the corner of his eye, as the basilisk lunged ahead. He stopped dead in his tracks, making sure to keep his eyes lowered and away from the basilisk's head, as he watched its huge form come to a stop in front of him.

Harry's eyes widened. Maybe it wasn't the right time for it, but Harry couldn't help but find himself suddenly entranced by the basilisk's magic. It was unlike anything he had ever seen before, greens bleeding into yellows bleeding into dark greys turning to black, a fog of power that seemed to suffuse the very air around it with poison.

The thing was, human magic didn't have color. Harry had noticed that already, but he'd never really thought about why that was. It had seemed obvious in the beginning, what with all the talk of Dark and Light magic, but in hindsight there didn't seem to be any reason for why magic had to be confined to colorless shades like that. And clearly, as long as humans weren't involved, it wasn't. So far, Harry had only really encountered three things with color in their magic; the Mirror of Erised, the Philosopher's Stone, and Fawkes. And now, with the basilisk, there were four.

But what did that mean? Why only those four things? Surely it wasn't *only* those four things, but Harry didn't really have anything else to compare them to. Was it a magical creature thing? But the Mirror and the Stone weren't creatures, so-

The basilisk shifted slightly, and Harry went still.

Right, he had to focus; he could worry about figuring out colorful magic later. He wouldn't be able to figure out anything about *any* kind of magic if he was dead.

That being said, Harry didn't really know what to do. He wasn't quite sure why he wasn't dead already, given that the basilisk could have easily killed him when it passed him just then.

Why hadn't it killed him? What was it even doing? It was just sitting there, in front of Harry. It was just...

It was blocking the exit.

It was clearly faster than Harry, easily could have eaten him immediately, but instead it was just sitting there, blocking the exit.

*Maybe it's not hostile*, Harry thought.

But then the basilisk opened its mouth. Harry could hear the sound its jaws made as they expanded - an *awful*, wet, sucking kind of noise, like flesh being slowly ripped - and it then let out a loud, terrifying, shrill screech that made Harry's blood turn to ice in his veins; and as much as Harry would have liked to believe this was all just a huge misunderstanding and the basilisk really wasn't hostile, there was no way he would have mistaken *that* sound as anything friendly.

Still, it didn't move to attack, and Harry watched warily as its magic flickered around it, looking almost...amused? Excited?

*The basilisk is playing with its food*, Harry realized suddenly. *It doesn't see me as a threat at all. It's happy to take its time, since it's probably been trapped here for who knows how long.*

*That's my chance.*

“*Iugo!*” he yelled, channeling as much magic as he could into the spell, launching it towards the body of the basilisk.

He'd momentarily considered casting something like a large cutting spell, but then he realized the scales would almost certainly be able to block any attacks coming from the outside like that. He couldn't afford to just deal damage that would only weaken it, either. Angering it with an attack that *didn't* kill it instantly would almost certainly end in his death. He needed to kill the basilisk in one hit. To that end, *Iugo* was by far his most powerful destructive spell, and with it he planned to create a small nuclear bomb from the scales that would rip it apart instantly. It didn't matter how strong the scales were if they themselves were the bombs. Harry would deal with the fallout later.

But when his magic hit the basilisk's scales, instead of sliding within to the atoms and their nuclei and initiating nuclear fusion, his power wavered for an instant, confused...

...and disappeared.

Harry's eyes widened.

*The basilisk's scales are a natural magical armor*, Draco had said, *strong enough to make it immune to any magic.*

Harry hadn't realized, hadn't even considered, the possibility that that meant they were also immune to *his* magic.

Then, the basilisk lunged.

Harry threw himself to the side, managing to dodge the attack by a hair's breadth. The basilisk, meanwhile, tore into one of the columns, and pieces of stone fell around its head, distracting it momentarily. Harry quickly stood and ran, trying to put as much distance between him and the basilisk as possible, even though he knew that that wouldn't really do anything. He knew he could not win the battle of speed, nor of strength...but perhaps he could win the battle of strategy.

Through the adrenaline and the chaos Harry tried his hardest to focus, imagining the basilisk's eyes in his mind. It didn't matter that he had no idea what they looked like, what they were made of, or that he wasn't looking in the basilisk's direction. He knew it was a big snake, he knew it had eyes, and that would have to be enough.

The basilisk had already given chase, and Harry could hear it right behind him. It would be upon him in an instant.

It would *have* to be enough, or he was dead.

“*Ignis!*” he yelled, throwing his hand behind him towards the form of the basilisk, trying to give his magic any guidance he could. He would have loved to use *Iugo* to practically guarantee killing it instantly, but the basilisk was *too* close now; and, in this kind of situation, Harry couldn't control the amount of power going into *Iugo* well enough to ensure that an explosion powerful enough to harm the basilisk *at all* wouldn't also kill him in the process. With *Ignis*, however, he could just go all out without fear of also harming himself, and there was always the chance that it was capable of doing enough damage to kill the basilisk anyways.

For a moment his magic fluttered, panicked and confused, and Harry began to feel despair at the thought that this, too, would not work. But then, his magic caught on *something*, a chink in the basilisk's armor—

*Its eyes.*

-and Harry immediately sent a tremendous wave of power down the link.

Behind him, the basilisk let out a shriek, piercing and terrible. It was music to Harry's ears.

He risked stopping to turn around and look at the basilisk, to ascertain the extent of the damage he'd caused, because if he hadn't even managed to destroy the eyes properly with all of the power he'd put into that spell he was done for anyways. But sure enough, there were two black, charred orbs in the basilisk's eye-sockets, smoke pouring out and a small flame still eating through the tissue. The basilisk wasn't anywhere near dead, clearly, but *Ignis* had worked, and its eyes were gone. Now he co-

But before Harry had time to decide on what to do next, the basilisk swung its body around in agony, and Harry felt a crushing impact on his chest.

Distantly he could feel himself flying, weightless, suspended in the air for an impossibly long moment before he was abruptly hitting the wall with a sickening crunch and then dropping to the ground like a stone. He sat there in a daze for a long moment, propped awkwardly against the wall where he'd fallen. He barely had the presence of mind to vaguely note that he was now a safe distance away from the basilisk's rampage, so he'd clearly traveled at least a few dozen feet in the air before the wall had so brusquely intervened. It was a miracle he was still conscious.

Harry wanted to sit up properly, to regain his bearings, but as he tried to move an agonized scream was ripped out of him. Startled, he turned his head to look down at his body.

His right foot was pinned underneath him at an odd angle, and was shaking with intermittent spasms, but that was not what had Harry suddenly feeling faintly nauseated.

Rather, it was the sight of his left arm, which was now twisted awkwardly behind his back.

Or, at least, part of it was.

Harry swallowed down bile as he tried his hardest to understand what he was looking at. The main issue was that Harry could tell his shoulders were hunched inwards in a way that should have made it impossible for his forearm to be in the position it was now, given how bones usually worked. The angle was simply *wrong*. His cloak was also obscuring most of his arm, so that made it harder for Harry to *see* what had happened, but...

But it didn't *feel* like his arm was merely dislocated.

*That must have been the crunch I heard*, Harry thought hollowly.

He realized suddenly that the basilisk had gone quiet. He quickly looked up, and the sight that caught his eyes made him freeze. The basilisk had clearly managed to douse out his *Ignis* by placing its eyes in the waters surrounding the passage, since there were droplets running down the scales on its face. More worryingly, in spite of it having no eyes, its face was turned straight in Harry's direction, and a sudden thought struck Harry like a punch to the gut.

*It heard my scream.*

The basilisk was still for a moment, and Harry had the fleeting hope that if he made no sound, somehow, it would just forget he was there and leave. But then its tongue flicked out, tasting the air.

*That's how snakes smell*, the thought arose, unbidden, into his mind. *Snakes have excellent senses of smell.*

The basilisk slowly turned its enormous body towards him.

*It can smell me*, he realized, and the thought was almost funny.

Almost, but not quite.

Slowly, like it knew he was incapacitated, the basilisk started to make its way over. Its eyes and mouth were now both firmly closed.

*It learned from its earlier mistake*, Harry realized, feeling a faint sense of amazement in spite of the situation. *It knows I can't do anything to its scales. It's clever.*

The basilisk didn't view him as harmless prey anymore. He was still obviously prey, but he was being taken seriously now, and with the basilisk's armor fully in place every advantage he'd had was now gone.

Harry tried to reach for his magic - to do *what* he had no idea - but it twisted under his grip, panicked and distressed and overwrought with adrenaline. He tried to think of a word to use, anything to give his magic form and direction, but he already knew that *Iugo* was useless against the scales directly, and he couldn't think of another offensive spell that would work in its stead. He tried to come up with some other word, a new one, but coming up with new spells and using them effectively was something that Harry would have had trouble with on a normal day, never mind with his magic in a frenzy and with a basilisk intent on killing him only a few dozen feet away. His chest felt depressurized, and even if he'd thought of something to say, he didn't think he would have been able to make the words form in his throat anyways.

*I'm going to die*, he thought.

Before today, Harry hadn't *really* ever thought about how he would die. He'd sort of jokingly assumed it would be an experiment gone wrong where something exploded in his face, or a barrier failed at the worst moment. But it had always been a kind of distant fantasy, a fictitious what-if that he had never truly believed would come to pass, and he'd never really cared about it longer than it took for him to set up the appropriate protections for himself during his experiments. Just because worrying about his eventual death had seemed like a waste of time didn't mean he was going to be reckless about his safety, obviously.

Except, he clearly *should* have been more worried. He'd gotten too used to all his experiments going his way, one way or another, or at least being within his control enough that they weren't dangerous to him.

*I suppose this is an experiment*, he thought, strangely calm. *One that I let get out of control, because I was reckless. But maybe it was always out of my control.*

The basilisk was only a few feet away from him now.

Harry closed his eyes. Even if he knew he was going to die, he still didn't want to see it happen. Darkness filled his vision, and his mind felt completely blank.

Then, a single thought emerged from the emptiness- *I should have used Iugo when I had the chance*. -and a sudden flurry of emotions suddenly surged within Harry to accompany it. He couldn't tell if it was mostly anger or frustration or simply just deep-seated annoyance that he was feeling - maybe it was a combination of all three - but it made him clench his jaw with its intensity.

*I had my chance. I should have just done it. Even if I had died, at least it would have been on my own terms, something I could control. Instead, I'm just going to be some overgrown snake's lunch,*

*because I got reckless. Overconfident.*

He wanted to laugh. He wanted to scream. He did neither.

*I don't want to die.*

*Not like this.*

*Not because of something I have no control over.*

Even with his eyes closed, he could hear the basilisk coming closer. It was only seconds away now.

*And the stupid thing is, I'm not even going to die because I was reckless, not really  
I'm going to die because the basilisk learned from its mistakes.*

*It learned to protect its eyes and mouth from my magic, and **that** was when I really lost all control over this experiment.*

He heard the sound of flesh being ripped again, the sound of its mouth opening, mere inches away.

*It learned it could survive Ignis, too.*

*It learned that, at this distance, I can't do anything to kill it before it kills me, even with a weakness exposed. Because if I could...*

*...I would have done it earlier.*

He could feel his magic pulsing in his throat like a heartbeat. It knew. It was ready.

*But I can also learn from my mistakes.*

Harry clenched his eyes shut as hard as he could.

*And this is **my** experiment.*

*"Iugo."*

Silence.

Suddenly, there was nothing but silence, and it felt like the very air around him had frozen in place.

Then a flicker of static, piercing through his core like a needle.

His magic had reacted instantly as he'd spoken, reaching for the basilisk's open mouth with murderous intent, but now it too was suddenly frozen in place, almost like it was caught on something.

No. That wasn't quite it.

It was like his magic - *all* of his magic, down to the depths of his core - had suddenly been caught by something, and then-

-lightning.

All he could think was that it felt like lightning.

There was no pain, but it seared through his arms, his legs, his chest, his head, power so deep and viscous that he felt like he was drowning in his own blood, molasses pouring into his lungs. It crackled outward, brilliant, uncontrollable, shattering the air around him and making his magic, *the* magic, weave around him like an vast thunderstorm. The smell of ozone suddenly filled his nose, his mouth, his lungs, ashes and copper and sweetness mixing into a cacophony of pungent sensory stimulus that felt like it was being stamped into his soul. And then, for an instant, Harry could feel everything around him. The castle, thrumming with energy; the students, sleeping and calm; the water soaking his robes, cold and enveloping; every tiny critter buried in between stones; the very air that stuttered in his chest.

But it was more than that.

He could feel every single *particle* that made up the castle's stones, every mineral embedded in its stones, every tiny metal vein within their rocky entrails. He could feel the heartbeat of every student, every cell that made up their skin, their blood, their bones, the very air that stuttered in *their* chests. Every atom in the water that surrounded him, the various impurities, the salt and sulfur that was dissolved within it, he could feel it all so clearly he could almost *taste* it. He could feel *everything*.

He could feel the basilisk, too, mere moments away from ripping him apart with its huge, dripping fangs. He could feel its magic, ancient and vast and powerful and *hungry*.

For an instant, he *was* the basilisk.

For an instant, he *was everything*.

Then, as suddenly as it came, the feeling dissipated.

And once again, there was silence.

Harry choked on the inhale, his lungs sore and bruised like he'd been punched in the ribs and sternum repeatedly. He opened his eyes, and in front of him lay the huge, iridescent form of the basilisk, motionless on the cold stone floor.

Even before opening his eyes, Harry had already known it was dead.

---

He didn't move for a long while.

Eventually, however, the awkward angle of his arm and the dull throbbing of his leg were too disturbing to ignore and he forced himself to focus. He noted absently that the left lens of his glasses was cracked, but he couldn't muster up even the tiniest sense of annoyance to go along with the thought.

The abrupt fading of that power had taken all of his anger and his desire to murder the basilisk with it. Now he just felt kind of numb, disconnected.

He looked around the Chamber, and his eyes caught onto the statue's still wide-open mouth.

Fear gripped him.

*Was there anything else in there?*

Harry tried to remember back to what it had felt like when the power had rushed through him, when he'd been able to feel everything surrounding him. Had there been anything else in this Chamber? Any other creatures? He could remember rocks and air and water and the basilisk but he couldn't really separate one thing from another, there were too many things to keep track of. Each rock wasn't just a rock, it was every single individual mineral that made *up* that rock, and then every single particle that made up that mineral. Each mouse wasn't just a mouse, it was all the skin and the blood and the fat and the fur, and each one of those tissues had their own molecules and particles that made them up as well. In the moment it had all felt so clear, each element individual and yet a whole and Harry had been able to comprehend it all almost like it was obvious, but as soon as the magic had dissipated his understanding of it all had fled with it. Even the general idea of that moment was fading fast, like a dream he'd been shaken awake from half-way through. He no longer really remembered what it had felt like, and he only had the vague observations he'd managed to make as the knowledge fled from his mind. Which meant that he couldn't remember if there was anything else in the Chamber that might be a danger to him.

Harry suddenly realized he'd started to hyperventilate, and he forced himself to calm down, to take longer, deeper breaths and hold them in, then release after a few seconds. He couldn't afford to panic right now. He wasn't safe. Sure he'd killed the basilisk with that magic but he had no idea *how* he'd done it, and he didn't want to try using it again unless he absolutely had to.

He shivered, almost convulsively.

What on earth had it been? That magic? That overwhelming, uncontrollable power? He didn't know what it *was*, or where it had come from. It wasn't Harry's magic, he knew that much, and it scared him.

The basilisk, while terrifying in its own right, was a being of flesh and blood that Harry could easily understand. Its magic had felt ancient and powerful but at the end of the day, it had still belonged to a creature that was mortal like any other. But that magic had been something else entirely. That magic, whoever it belonged to, *whatever* it belonged to... Harry swallowed thickly, trying to dislodge the sudden feeling of dread that had risen within his throat. He knew he could have killed everything in the castle in that moment. In that moment, when he'd been able to feel everything, when he'd *been* everything... He could have done it. He'd known, in that moment, that he could.

And what scared him was that, in that moment, he wasn't sure why he *hadn't*.

He suddenly realized he was hyperventilating again, and he forced himself to calm down, to take slow, measured breaths and to calm his racing heart-beat.

Now wasn't the time to think about that magic. He had more important things to worry about.

Harry shook his head, trying to get rid of some of the numbness that had suffused his brain like cotton, but the motion only caused him mild pain and he quickly stopped. He took in a few deep breaths, and then a few more. He carefully grabbed at his magic, which had been fluttering around

him like it was dizzy, and slowly calmed it down. Finally, after a few minutes, he felt almost normal again. Well, almost to a certain degree. Semi-normal. It would have to do for now.

Harry carefully cast *Silentem Obice* and *Effugiat* around him, to give him some semblance of protection in case something came crawling out of the stonework while he was distracted. As he was putting them up, he noted with some annoyance that something like a barrier that prevented the basilisk from smelling him probably would have helped back then. In hindsight, there were probably a lot of things that he could have done better during that fight, if he'd had the time or presence of mind to think of them, but in that moment all could think about was how to kill the basilisk as quickly as possible.

*So much for winning the battle of strategy*, he scoffed at himself. All he'd done in the end was overpower the basilisk with brute magical power that wasn't even his own.

The thought of the magic once again had fear running through him, and he forced himself to stop thinking about it at all. He had more immediate problems to worry about, for Merlin's sake.

Like his injuries, specifically his arm, which was twisted so unnaturally that even just looking at it made him feel slightly sick. It didn't really hurt, surprisingly, but Harry was fairly sure that that was just due to shock. It was obvious his arm was messed up in some major way, and it would probably start feeling like it soon. His ribs also felt deeply bruised, but he could inhale deeply without too much trouble, so they were probably fine. If anything, Harry thought, his arm had clearly taken the blow for them. He wasn't sure if that was a good or a bad thing, but he *was* sure that a punctured lung would not have been particularly fun to deal with, so he'd take the arm instead.

"Fuck, okay," he whispered, bracing himself. His cloak was camouflaging the specific location of the damage, so he gently used his right hand to feel around his upper arm, and sure enough, he quickly found a section just under the shoulder where the bone had very clearly fractured, poking outwards distinctively. The whole area throbbed dully. Harry brought his hand away, and realized it was covered in blood that had also been camouflaged by his black cloak.

So the bone had probably pierced directly through his skin.

Delightful.

Harry took a deep breath. He needed to set the fracture first. He knew he wouldn't be able to heal everything perfectly, and there was even the chance that he'd just make everything worse. But...

...but Harry didn't know if there was anything else in here that would try to harm him. That would try to kill him. He'd gotten lucky, with the basilisk, with...he wasn't going to think about it. Lucky was probably the wrong word anyways, but he was still alive, at least.

And if something came at him while his humerus was half-torn from his arm, he didn't think 'luck' would have anything to do with what happened next.

Harry clenched his jaw. He knew, knew that there was a huge danger to trying to heal his arm. Various huge dangers in fact. Using his magic on himself directly was something that Harry had avoided doing for a long time for a *very* good reason.

Basically, magic had a tendency to...misfire, so to speak, when it was first being used with a brand new spell. And although that was fine when the spell misfired on an object, Harry had little doubt that he would be distinctly less fine with it if it misfired on himself. In trying to heal his arm, Harry knew there was a decent chance that something would simply get misinterpreted by his magic,

and...well, all kinds of things could go wrong. His arm could explode. His bone could rip itself off his arm. His bone could rip itself *into* his arm. Into his chest, even, if he was *really* unlucky.

He could kill himself, was what he was trying to say. If things went *really* wrong.

But the thing was, Harry had been ready to die. When the basilisk had opened its mouth in front of him, Harry had decided to use *Iugo* on it *knowing* it would kill him; in that moment he'd chosen to die by his own hand than at the basilisk's mercy. And even now, knowing that there might just not be anything else dangerous in the Chamber...the mere chance that there *might* be something else was enough to make Harry want to try. Even if he was risking hurting himself, killing himself. Laying here helpless as something else attacked him felt infinitely worse to Harry than taking the chance to heal his arm.

Because, when it came down to it, it was simply a matter of having control.

It was something Harry had never really thought about before, but in that moment, in front of the basilisk, it was *all* he'd been able to think about.

That when it came to his life and death, Harry wanted to have *control*.

Control, in that moment, had meant killing the basilisk even though it would also mean killing himself. And control, in this case, was choosing to heal his arm even knowing that he might end up dying in the attempt.

Besides, even if he *didn't* end up fighting anything, Harry still needed to heal the wound the fracture had created if he didn't want to risk the bone tearing his arm open when he moved, and he couldn't really do that without putting the pieces of bone that were sticking out of his arm back in place first. He'd probably get a nasty infection either way, but that was the *least* of his worries at the moment.

Harry took in a deep breath, and he could feel himself start to settle down. There was something strangely calming about knowing that he was deciding to do this of his own volition. That if he died now it was entirely because he'd chosen to. He wasn't *choosing* to die, obviously, but if he did...

Well. He'd always thought he would die due to an experiment gone wrong, anyways. So attempting to set his arm it was. Now, how to start?

In general, Harry's experience with using his magic medically was limited to cuts and bruises, and other minor topical maladies that he could fairly easily understand and address. He wasn't a doctor by any stretch of the imagination, and he certainly did not feel like he understood the human body well enough to try messing with it too much, especially not when it was his own. But, desperate times called for desperate measures, and he certainly was not in the position to ask someone else for help. In any case, Harry had studied anatomy for a fair bit, so he knew what the structural and cellular components of bones were. He didn't really know how to set bones the normal way, but given that he had magic, science based medicine didn't really apply to this situation anyways. He'd just have to improvise.

"It *would* be really funny if after all of that I just ended up killing myself from this," Harry murmured, holding his broken arm as best he could against his side with the other hand, making sure to prop his back against the wall securely. He felt gently around the upper section of his humerus, placing his hand on top of where he could feel that the bone had fractured, and particularly where it was emerging through the skin. "The surgical neck is the most likely place to break~" he singsonged faintly, and the thought almost made him want to laugh. His sense of

humor felt as fractured as his arm, like everything was hilarious and yet completely unfunny at the same time.

His sense of humor was broken. His humerus was broken. There was a joke to be made there, but Harry couldn't quite figure out what it was.

He briefly considered casting a pain-numbing spell on himself to hopefully make this whole process less awful, but then decided it was just safer not to. Although the numbing spell was meant to target pain receptors only, Harry had still noticed that it affected his proprioception a fair amount. Given that knowledge, Harry was worried that any alteration of his perception of his arm's position would affect the setting of the bone, and might even directly cause his spell to go awry. And obviously, Harry was significantly more scared of harming himself irreparably - and possibly killing himself - by making a mistake with setting his arm with magic than he was of *any* amount of pain.

He focused back on his arm, swallowing thickly. He had one try to make this work. If he failed, the best scenario was that he was still alive, and likely in a world of pain. He would be in pain regardless, he was sure, but trying to set the bone after messing up once would undoubtedly be much worse. Harry tried not to think about his magic just ripping his shoulder straight off from his spine in an effort to 'align it' with the bottom half of his arm. He didn't *think* it would, but he didn't *know* that it wouldn't, either. Magic was *funny* like that sometimes, after all, especially when he was using a spell for the first time.

His magic spun around him. He'd managed to calm it down most of the way, but it was now feeling distinctly unsettled again. Which was fair, Harry wasn't feeling great either, but fair wasn't what he needed right now. He needed this *work*. To that end, he used all of his concentration, every ounce of power he had within him, to guide his magic properly, hold it in place. There was no room for error here, for misinterpretations or confusion.

He needed this to work. He needed to have *control*.

With his magic in his grasp. Harry began focusing on the idea of his arm being whole again. On the lower section of his arm aligning with the upper one, and not the other way around. He focused on it settling back into the correct place and with the correct blood vessels, lymph vessels, nerves. On the compact bone sections aligning, the spongy bone sections aligning, the Haversian Canals and the lacuna and the lamellae, all of them finding where they had been split and *un*-splitting. Anything that Harry could possibly remember about the relevant anatomy that could help guide the two sections of bone correctly to one another, even down to individual cells.

He knew he was forgetting some features, but his memory refused to focus further, almost feeling blurred around the edges.

Maybe the shock really was affecting him.

But he wasn't going to give up now.

"*Reformo*," Harry said.

His magic flared around the wound. It bent around his arm, confused about what exactly Harry wanted it to do, because Harry had never done this before and there were too many details, too many things to control, too many things he was *trying* to control. It was like that magic all over again, except this time he didn't *have* that magic and he couldn't do it. He couldn't control his magic.

He was losing control again.

Harry took a deep breath that hitched halfway through. He took another one. Then two more.

He knew what a bone was. He knew how it was made. He wasn't even trying to change anything, he just wanted to put things back where they belonged.

He *could* do this.

He *had* to do this.

"*Reformo*," he said, and this time he tried focusing on the *intent* behind the word rather than all the individual details that his brain couldn't keep track of right now.

*Just put everything back together*, he thought. *Align everything just like it was before.*

*It's all there, nothing's different, nothing's changed.*

*Just put it back.*

"*Reformo*," he whispered.

And this time, he could feel as his magic caught onto the fracture.

He could *feel* it, feel as it caught onto his bone, his veins, his blood, his nerves; caught onto all the breaks and ridges and shards that had gotten lost; caught onto all the tiny little parts and pieces that had broken apart and become separated from one another. He could feel as his magic abruptly *pulled* everything back together.

For a moment, Harry felt nothing.

Then, nothing but pain.

A searing, screeching agony, the likes of which Harry had never felt before, hadn't even realized it was possible to feel, flared viciously all over the wound and into his arm. It was boiling acid pouring through his bones and his tissues and his veins, every single cell in his arm getting burned alive. It felt like all the blood in his arm had been replaced by flowing lava, except worse, because at least lava would have eventually seared through his nerves and his pain receptors and killed them. But this pain was due to his magic putting him back together, it wasn't *harming* him, and so his pain receptors were doing just fine and were perfectly happy to let him know *exactly* how much agony he was currently experiencing.

And with all his concentration gone in the sudden whirlwind of inescapable agony, around him, his barriers broke.

The pain went on for what was actually only around five minutes, but to Harry it felt endless. He wanted to scream but the pain was so *much* that screaming wasn't working, so he settled for intermittent, indecipherable cursing and gasping sobs instead.

He barely had the presence of mind to hope that there really *was* nothing else in this Chamber, because right now he was *completely* defenseless.

After the five minute mark, the pain dulled significantly, but the respite only meant that Harry could now break down crying properly. The sobbing was largely due to the pain, of course, but he also felt like it helped drain out the worse of the overwhelming relief that had struck him as soon as

the all-consuming agony had abated. Relief that his magic hadn't ripped his arm off just then, relief at surviving the basilisk's flailing strike, relief at surviving *himself* after he'd cast *Iugo* at the basilisk's mouth when he'd *known* that it was mere inches away, and been fully aware of what that meant.

Relief at surviving, when he'd been certain he wouldn't.

Once he'd calmed down enough to stop, he felt significantly better, both physically and emotionally. He gingerly ran his hand down the length of his freshly un-broken arm to verify that it had indeed set correctly. He could feel some inflammation coming in, but as far as Harry could tell the actual bone had gone back into its place. He could even move his fingers now, if with a lot of pain. The wound seemed to have mostly closed as well, although Harry knew he would have a nasty scar regardless of whether he'd managed to heal it completely. He'd never figured out how to cure a wound such that it didn't leave behind a fairly obvious scar, and he probably wouldn't before this one healed completely. He wouldn't have cared anyways, except that he *was* slightly worried that someone would ask questions about it. But to be fair, as long as he was alive for someone to ask him questions about anything, Harry was counting that as a success.

When Harry finally felt capable of focusing enough to use magic again he immediately cast *Prohibere dolore*, letting the numbing sensation spread through his shoulder and arm, as well as through his lower leg and foot. He could move his foot but it hurt a significant amount to do it, so he was pretty sure he had torn a ligament in his ankle or at least twisted it very badly.

He could probably have healed it in a similar way to his arm, but Harry instantly decided he'd rather just *not*. Setting his arm had been absolutely horrific, without a doubt the single worst experience of his entire life, and as such, Harry no longer had any interest in trying to heal himself further. He might honestly rather just get eaten by the basilisk than ever cast *Reformo* on himself ever again; he'd definitely consider it for a good long while, at any rate.

In hindsight he probably should have tried numbing his arm, higher risks of dying or not. But then again, given what had happened to his barriers, Harry was fairly certain that his numbing spell would also have stopped working almost instantly, so he still would have had to suffer through that agony regardless. At least this way he'd known it was coming, not that he felt like that had made it any more bearable. Harry felt that the idea was sound, though, and he felt like he *might* consider using *Reformo* again in combination with an exceedingly strong numbing potion, *maybe*. Just to see if it would work again. Or with another kind of injury... but, regardless, he didn't have any numbing potions on hand so he wasn't going to indulge his curiosity at this time, no matter what.

The spell dulled the pain enough that Harry finally felt like he could think properly again. He played around with the amount of magic attached to the numbing spell until it felt bearable to put pressure on his limbs, and gently pushed himself into a standing position. He was no longer in excruciating pain, but the numbness meant his balance was off, so it took him a few minutes to figure out how to walk without falling over.

He'd tried limping, but his arm felt swollen, tender and raw despite the lack of pain, and he didn't want to jolt it any more than he absolutely had to; just because he'd set the arm didn't mean there wasn't still an injury. He didn't want to make a crutch either, because that would require his one good arm to use properly, and he wanted that free just in case *anything* happened. He finally thought to just tear off a lower portion of his cloak and form two makeshift bandages with his magic that he carefully wrapped around his ankle and upper arm to give the injuries some support without impeding his movements. With that he could walk fairly well, if very slowly, but Harry was satisfied with that for now.

With the worst of his injuries now taken care of, Harry suddenly remembered what exactly had landed him into this whole mess to begin with. He pulled out Tom Riddle's diary from his pocket with a scowl.

So much for trust.

“*Obice*,” he muttered, letting his magic encapsulate it thickly. The diary did not fight back, and in fact it seemed to be dormant, none of Tom's magic visible beyond an extremely faint layer near the diary's surface. Maybe he had used up all of his power reserves in summoning the basilisk, Harry thought absently as he placed it in his pocket. As soon as he'd realized the diary wasn't really ‘conscious’, his anger at it had faded away into a simmering, cold pit in the depths of his chest. He would deal with Tom later.

For now, Harry had to figure out how he was going to get out of the Chamber.

The way in was always an option, but Harry wasn't really looking forward to climbing up a wet pipe with a sprained ankle and a freshly un-broken arm, even numbed as he was. His magic felt stressed and on-edge, his control on it frayed and unpredictable after having used so much concentration and power on fixing his arm, so Harry didn't really want to use it more than absolutely necessary. Keeping himself properly numb was already taking up a good amount of his focus, when usually a spell like that would have been almost automatic.

The other possibility was looking into the room that Tom had talked about, Slytherin's library. Harry hoped he hadn't lied about that, although given everything that had happened so far he had very little reason to trust anything Tom had said. But the way he'd described it to Harry, both the level of detail as well as the level of familiarity, made him believe Tom hadn't just been making it up. Besides, while he had believed Tom before when he'd said the pipe was the main way into the Chamber, now that Harry had actually seen - and been inside - the pipe it was clear he'd been lying. Harry wasn't sure what exactly he'd expected it to be like in the first place, but there was obviously no way Salazar Slytherin had come and gone by sliding down and then scrambling back up that entire disgusting, wet duct every time, even if it hadn't originally lead to a girl's lavatory. There *had* to be some kind of stairs, or an elevator, or a ramp or *something* that Tom had omitted. In any case, Harry didn't risk anything by at least looking for the library; after all, it made sense that there would be some kind of stairs leading to it directly.

*I don't risk anything unless, of course*, he corrected himself as he looked up to the gigantic, unmoving body that lay in the middle of the Chamber, *there's a basilisk in there, too*.

Harry *really* wished he could remember what he'd felt with that magic. But he couldn't, so he decided to cast another *Tegmentum* just in case, even though with his current control it felt brittle and uneven and probably wouldn't protect him against anything bigger than a dog.

As he felt the spell wrap around him, he made a mental note that he really needed to get some better defensive spells. *Tegmentum* had saved him from being crushed by the tail's initial strike - and don't get him wrong, he was extremely grateful for that - but it hadn't stopped his arm from breaking and his ankle from spraining in the subsequent impact with the wall once his control had faltered. If Harry hadn't managed to kill the basilisk right then, he would have died anyways, and while he wasn't planning on encountering another basilisk again anytime soon, it would be stupid not to address such an obvious weakness in his defensive repertoire.

Slowly, taking care not to jostle his arm and putting as little pressure as possible on his ankle he approached the mouth of Salazar Slytherin's statue once again, looking carefully inside to check there weren't any scales or movement. A quick *Illuminare* showed a cavernous, empty area, with a distinctive door on the left side of the mouth, around where the inner area of a cheek would

be. Harry stepped into the mouth, trying not to think of it just closing and crushing him. He knew the diary was now contained, his magic barrier still surrounding it, but he also felt his paranoia was justified.

He tried to use *Transpicio* on the door first, but the rock was too thick and Harry's magic was too frail, so he gave up on that idea pretty quickly. The door to the room moved when he pushed it, which surprised Harry until he remembered that, apart from Slytherin's statue, to open every door up to this point all he'd had to do was say 'open', so maybe Slytherin just didn't believe in locking doors. But then again, to reach this particular room one would also have to fight a basilisk, so having any lock would perhaps be overkill.

*As if having a basilisk as a guard isn't overkill in and of itself*, Harry thought grumpily as he opened the door slightly. He then pulled his *Illuminare* through the opening to provide some light and make sure there were no further nasty surprises waiting for him inside. Thankfully nothing moved within the room, and after waiting for a few more seconds just to make sure nothing *started* moving, Harry carefully stepped inside.

Given the rest of the Chamber's dilapidated state Harry hadn't really had high expectations for the library anymore, but thankfully he was quite pleasantly surprised.

It was relatively small, about the size of his dorm room, but it was stocked from floor to ceiling with sturdy, wooden shelves filled with books of all widths, colors and sizes. In the left corner of the room there was a green velvet chair placed in front of a large dark-wood desk, with a quill and ink-pot to one side. There were no stairs or other exits to the room in sight, and Harry sighed.

He was beginning to suspect that the only way he was going to get out of here was by asking Tom about it, and he didn't think he would get any answers without having some form of leverage over him. Threatening to kill him would probably only get Harry so far, because although he was definitely open to the idea, Harry didn't necessarily want to kill Tom just *yet*. He'd kill him eventually, obviously, but Tom still had information that Harry wanted. And if Harry wasn't sincere in his threat to kill him he knew Tom would be able to tell he was lying, which would make his threat rather ineffective. He also didn't yet know *how* to kill Tom; Harry was fairly sure *Iugo* would work, but the fight with the basilisk had made him wary of using that spell as a way to test something's defenses, so he wanted to see if he could figure out what else might work. He had a suspicion that, just like the basilisk, *Ignis* would not be enough.

Harry took a look around the room.

Where to start, then? What book would possibly have information about Tom that Harry could use against him?

*His notes on his research.*

Harry didn't really know what Tom's notes contained other than what Tom had told him the first time they'd spoken, but given that he had no other leads he might as well take a look at them. Which, assuming Tom hadn't lied, would be stored within the left-most cabinet of the desk. And regardless of whether Harry believed that Tom had or hadn't lied, he was *fairly* sure that he wouldn't find a teeny tiny basilisk hidden in that cabinet anyways, so he might as well see what it contained.

And so Harry approached the desk, taking out the diary from his pocket and setting it to one side, while making sure the barrier was still in place. He sat down gingerly in the chair, careful not to bump his ankle or arm, and he opened the left-most cabinet. Inside, just as Tom had said, were a pile of parchments, and Harry carefully and single-handedly pulled them all out and placed them

on top of the desk, neatly arranging them in a pile on the side opposite the quill and ink-pot. Then, he grabbed the top-most parchment from the pile and placed it squarely in front of him.

The text swam in front of his eyes for a moment, and Harry wondered if he was about to faint. However his vision soon cleared up again, and Harry was able to read the text written on the page.

*On the Creation of Soul Containers*

*Subject: T.M. Riddle*

Tom's research, just like he'd said, and Harry was genuinely surprised it was even real.

Except...the subject was strange. Why was Tom listed as being the *subject*? Wasn't this supposed to be Tom's research on immortal vessels in which to store...

Souls.

Tom wasn't a memory, Tom was a *soul*.

Tom was a soul stored in an immortal vessel, a 'soul container'.

This was research about the creation of the diary, about *Tom*.

But even as the realization settled in, Harry frowned. Why would Tom have even told him about these notes if they were about *him*? Why had he even told Harry about this library in the first place? Wasn't this clearly giving Harry access to extremely sensitive information about him? Tom wasn't stupid, surely he *had* to have realized that by telling Harry about this research and then *betraying* him, he was putting himself in grave danger?

...except that wasn't quite true, was it? Because as far as Tom was concerned, Harry would never even have the chance to access this library, much less have a chance to find these notes and realize what they were *truly* about. Because Tom had clearly assumed Harry would be too busy being dead to bother with any of that, and he'd been so *sure* that his plan with the basilisk would work that he'd actually decided not to lie about the library at all. He'd actively made the decision to lure Harry into the Chamber with *real information* that Harry could use against him, because he'd been *certain* Harry wouldn't be alive to reach it.

Which meant that Harry really *had* assumed the wrong thing about Tom's personality initially, at least when it came to his pride. But, rather than mistakenly assuming the other boy wasn't humble, Harry's mistake had instead been in assuming that Tom wasn't arrogant. Because clearly, Tom *was* arrogant. Tom was arrogant enough to get himself *killed*.

*Or maybe he's just overconfident. Reckless, just like I was.*

It wasn't exactly a funny thought, but Harry found himself smiling anyways.

Because the thing was, Harry had little doubt that he would have been able to find something in this library that he could use against Tom, even without the notes. Something that he could use to *force* Tom to tell him how to get out of here, to pry out of him all the information he had on how to resurrect Voldemort, maybe even to tell Harry *why* he'd betrayed him like this, when all Harry had been trying to do was *help him*.

But the issue was that Harry would have probably had to go through most, if not all, of the books in the library to find the relevant information, and with his arm in the state it was, the amount of time that that would have taken him might actually just have lead to Harry dying from sepsis. He could

feel the pulse of the infection in his arm even now, burning faintly within his skin, painless due to the numbing but the heat of a localized fever was unmistakable. Even with his magic, Harry didn't think he would have been able to figure out how to cure an infection like this, not before it killed him. Infections were nothing like mending wounds or even bones. Harry had no idea where he would have ever started.

But now, thanks to Tom's overconfidence, Harry wouldn't have to go through the books in the library at all, wouldn't have to worry about dying of any infection. Tom had told him where to find his notes, and Tom had told him what they were about, and it hadn't been hard for Harry to realize what that implied. Because of what Tom had *told* him.

*How ironic, Harry thought, that believing in what Tom told me nearly got me killed. And now, it will get Tom killed, instead.*

This was still *Harry's* experiment. And now, he was back in control.

## Chapter End Notes

PSA part II electric boogaloo aka a general disclaimer now that we're getting into some more intense stuff: always remember this is just a work of fiction and it is not meant to reflect real people or real situations, and just because something happens in this story doesn't mean that I as the author believe in it or condone it or think it's the right thing to do irl etcetc. characters are characters, story is story, fiction is fiction :D please enjoy at your own risk <3

I chose not to tag the warnings listed above mainly because they already fit under the categories of graphic violence and disturbing themes and moral ambiguity and war and so i felt it was unnecessary, and even that tagging them specifically would be misleading. That being said, I'm still figuring out tagging for this story, so depending on what happens later that decision might change. Because of that I still felt like giving specific warnings at this point was merited, just because i suspect y'all are not expecting things to get this dark, this fast.

*That* being said, once again, this story really isn't that dark overall, as much as this chapter might indicate otherwise. The general tone will still be very similar to what it was earlier, just with more Tom in it, and all that that entails. I hope y'all are looking forward to it :D

I really hope you enjoy this chapter! Thank you for reading <3

### **Latin Trans:**

Iugo: join, yoke | Prohibere dolore: stop pain | Silentem obice: silent obstruction, silencing barrier | Ignis: fire, ignite | Reformo: reform, rectify | Transpicio: see through

# Pactum

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### Pactum | Agreement

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Within an hour, Harry had managed to go through four parchments. Three of them had a lot of research on what a general ‘soul container’ was, along with possible capacities, functions, appearances, how to maintain them, how to make them last a long time, and other facts that were interesting but not really what Harry was looking for. The other parchment had had a diagram of a book, with notes scribbled all around it, things like ‘address perils of using ink as ritual medium’ or ‘magic requirements for higher-level functions unsustainable’, and other small snippets lacking context.

All in all, Harry now had a better idea of what the diary was and what features it *could* possess but, to be honest, the research was generic enough that all he’d really acquired were more questions. The only even mildly useful piece of information he’s found so far was a small section that stated that soul containers *could* be destroyed; however it didn’t really tell him specifically *how*, so it still wasn’t particularly helpful as Harry *had* already assumed they could be destroyed.

There were still quite a few parchments to go through, so Harry wasn’t necessarily losing hope, but...he was definitely starting to get frustrated, and a little bit worried.

Refusing to think about what would happen if he *couldn’t* find anything after all of this, Harry reached for another parchment, pulling it close, and then frowned as he read what was written.

*Tom Marvolo Riddle.*

*I am Lord Voldemort.*

The rest was blank. Which was odd on its own, but the words were also odd.

It was a strange two phrases, both together and independently. One a name, the other a statement.

How could they be read together, then? Was it a letter? ‘Hello Tom, I am Lord Voldemort’? Maybe even a warning? A threat?

Harry frowned. None of the those options seemed likely. Maybe they weren’t mean to be read together? Maybe they were meant to be understood separately? But what could he learn from them that way? Tom’s full name was something, he supposed, but he was sure the diary would have told him if he asked; it wasn’t like Harry hadn’t already known all the initials. And ‘I am Lord Voldemort’ didn’t really tell him anything. Harry didn’t even know if ‘Voldemort’ was his first or last name, or if that even was his *real* name.

Harry’s eyes widened in sudden understanding, and he reached out to one of the quills next to the pile of parchment, noting with some surprise that the inkwell still worked. He hesitated for a moment, the quill raised above the parchment, before deciding that it was all empty anyways, so not using it to make sure this worked would be a waste.

He quickly counted the letters in each phrase, noting the numbers down on the parchment. They matched perfectly.

It was an anagram.

Tom Marvolo Riddle was Lord Voldemort's real name.

Tom *was* Voldemort.

Harry stared at the parchment, his mind going through everything he knew about Tom and everything he knew about Voldemort.

Was it possible? Was Tom really Voldemort? Somehow, it felt both impossible and obvious simultaneously.

Obvious and yet impossible because of the diary's magic, which had felt so suspiciously similar to Voldemort's, but hadn't really *looked* the same. The thing was, there had been a certain kind of faintness, almost like a greyish sheen, to the wraith's magic that was completely absent from Tom's. However, given this new information, it was easy to assume that that was due to the wraith being, well, a wraith. Or perhaps it was due to the insanity, or the amount of time that had passed, or any other number of things that could probably affect how magic looked even when it belonged to the same person. But the thing was, plenty of people had magic that looked and felt *similar*; Draco and Pansy's magics, for example, were of very similar shades and often behaved very similarly, which Harry had always assumed was due to the fact that they had similar families and had decently similar personalities. As such, assuming that Voldemort and Tom were the same person because they had magic which felt similar, even suspiciously so, simply wasn't the kind of thing Harry was liable to do; it would be like assuming two people were related just because they had similar personalities and similar hair, let alone assuming two people were the *literal same person* because of that.

Speaking of hair, another reason why Harry hadn't ever considered that Tom and Voldemort might be the same person was simply because Tom and Voldemort looked nothing alike physically. Harry had seen a few pictures of the Dark Lord in his prime; a middle-aged man with light-brown hair and blue eyes, handsome but in a distinctly more rugged way than Harry remembered Tom being. His features were rougher, his countenance more broad...he just gave off a very different impression overall, and Harry had never for an instant been reminded of Tom when he saw a picture of Voldemort. But once again, now that the idea had been planted in Harry's mind, he felt it was perfectly possible that Tom had simply altered his appearance with magic for his political debut. Why he had done that was a different question altogether - and one that Harry didn't really care about - but he knew that Glamours and other appearance altering spells existed so it certainly wasn't an impossible notion by any means.

The third issue to assuming Tom and Voldemort were the same person was the 'soul' aspect. If Tom was a soul, what was the wraith? Was it just Voldemort without a soul? But this diary had been created fifty years ago, had Voldemort just existed all that time without his soul? Was it possible for *anyone* to exist without their soul? Was Tom *actually* just a memory and Harry was coming up with nonsense now? What about if Tom was just *part* of Voldemort's soul? Was that even possible? Were souls even things that could be split in the first place?

Regardless, Harry wasn't really going to get anywhere sitting here wondering about whether Tom and Voldemort were the same person. Tom's notes strongly implied they were, and really, what more evidence did Harry need?

Harry sighed, exasperated.

Overall, it was a strange kind of realization, somehow almost meaningless to him in that moment. A part of Harry felt like he should be feeling deeply betrayed, angry, maybe scared, but mostly all

he could feel was annoyance. Annoyance, because something like this would throw a huge wrench in all of his plans, and if there was one thing that annoyed Harry it was when his plans went awry, especially when it was for stupid reasons. And Tom trying to get him killed by luring him into a Chamber with a basilisk waiting inside *certainly* fell under that category.

Harry suddenly realized with dry amusement that the two phrases side by side reminded him of word puzzles he'd seen in children's books.

*I have ears, but I cannot hear. Who am I? I am corn.*

*I can run, but I have no legs. Who am I? I am water.*

*My name is Tom Marvolo Riddle, but I use an anagram as my pseudonym. Who am I? I am Lord Voldemort.*

It wasn't even a *good* anagram.

But regardless of what Harry thought about Tom's attempts at subtlety, this was probably the most valuable piece of information about Tom he'd be able to find within these notes.

Which meant it was time to see how Tom was doing.

Harry turned to the diary, releasing the barrier. The diary's magic fluttered about it slowly, curiously, as if it was looking for something it had dropped. Its calm demeanor sent a sudden rush of uncontrollable fury tearing through Harry. It caught him by surprise with its intensity, a fire through his veins that made him want to *hurt* Tom. Then, just as quickly, it was gone, and he was left somewhat bereft in its wake.

"That was...something," he muttered, confused and worried about the ferocity of his emotional response to just looking at the diary. But when nothing happened after a few seconds, Harry relaxed once again.

He opened the diary and grabbed the quill that was on the desk, hesitating for a moment on what to write, then decided it was best to just address the elephant - or, well, basilisk - in the room. He noted that, on the very tiny bright side, it had been his left arm that had gotten broken so he could still write easily.

And what better way to start this conversation than by taunting Tom for his failure to kill Harry.

*<I killed your little pet.>*

The diary's magic went still. It did not reply for almost thirty seconds, and Harry was about to write the message again, when the response emerged, slow and cautious.

*<<How?>>*

Harry could feel the sheer shock, the incredulity encompassed in the single word. It was a fair sentiment, to be honest; Harry wasn't sure how he'd done it, either. But instead of answering Tom's question, he decided to taunt him again.

*<It's a bit of a waste, but I hope you're happy.>*

The reply this time was quick, indignant and angry. *<<You've just killed an ancient, mythical creature who had been alive since even before the Founding of Hogwarts. I hope you're happy.>>*

The hypocrisy - no, the sheer *audacity* of the statement stunned Harry speechless for a few seconds, and was then replaced with anger.

<Don't you dare blame me for that, *you* caused all of this. If you had just trusted me, none of this would have happened. What was your plan? To have the basilisk kill me, and then what? Possess the basilisk? Have it write down all of its snaky little secrets to you as you take its power? Or to rot here, powerless and helpless, until the end of time?>

Tom's magic snapped at him, indignant. <<Do you really think me that stupid? I wouldn't have had the basilisk kill you.>>

Harry blinked at the words, startled. He really *hadn't* been expecting that answer. It felt like an obvious lie, except Tom seemed genuinely angry that Harry had accused him of it. Now to be fair, Harry really *didn't* think Tom was actually that stupid, but the basilisk had definitely *acted* like it was trying to kill him. <No? Maybe you should have told the basilisk that?>

The diary did not respond and Harry stared at it impassively, his annoyance mounting with every passing second. Tom probably thought that Harry intended to keep him around even if he wasn't cooperative just because Tom knew how to resurrect the Dark Lord. But Harry wanted an explanation for what had happened, wanted to know what on earth Tom had been planning, to see if trying to work with Voldemort was even still a possibility. It didn't seem likely, but maybe there was some kind of explanation for all of this, some stupid misunderstanding that could easily be rectified if only Tom would *talk to him*.

Except that Tom clearly thought Harry was still mostly in the dark - and, as always, clearly intended to keep him that way - which meant it was time to let Tom know what Harry had found.

<You are a part of Voldemort's soul.>

Tom's magic froze. <<You found my notes.>>

It wasn't a question, but it *was* a confirmation of Harry's worst suspicions, that Tom really had been deceiving him about everything from the start.

<Just tell me what all of this was about, Tom.> And then, because he was irritated, added, <Honestly, this time.>

<<You want honesty? Are you sure about that?>>

That sounded distinctly ominous, but Harry forced himself not to react negatively just yet. <Yes.>

Tom's magic flared suddenly, amusement and viciousness written in every flicker, every *snap*. But there was something else, too. It looked strange, discordant, almost-

Tom's magic abruptly coiled into itself before Harry had a chance to really recognize what it meant, and then a message emerged: <<Very well, if you *insist*.>>

Abruptly, a swell of words began appearing.

<<Let me see, I suppose the first thing I should tell you is that the words I spoke in front of the statue were not simply meant to release the basilisk; they activated a ritual that I set up a long time ago for this very occasion. Through that ritual, I was able to momentarily connect my magic with the basilisk's and communicate with it. And I gave it *very* specific orders.>>

Harry scowled. So that was what that sudden surge of power had been about. <Specific orders to

kill me.>

Tom's magic snapped at him, this time in distinctly more amusement. <<You really have no idea, do you? I wasn't going to have the basilisk *kill* you, no, that really *would* have been a waste. No, why would I have it kill you when I could just have it rip all of your limbs *off*?>>

Harry froze. *Rip his limbs...off? What...?*

<<They were clearly rather unnecessary, and I wouldn't have wanted you to run away or retaliate, wouldn't you agree?>> Tom continued, cruel and merciless, his magic swirling around him joyously in a way that was quite simply undeniably sadistic. <<And in case you were thinking you would have died of blood loss, don't worry, I'm not stupid enough to let *that* happen, either. Basilisk venom is a very strong coagulant, you see, which means it would have taken you at least a few minutes to die from just your bleeding, even from injuries that severe. No, I would *easily* have been able to take all of your magic through your blood in that time by absorbing it, like *ink*; and once I had killed you by draining you of your power completely I would have been able to create my own body.>> His magic snapped at Harry viciously. <<So you see, *Harry*, the lack of magic is what would have killed you, not the basilisk. *I* would have left you as a powerless husk of a corpse, and only once you were *already* dead would I have let the basilisk eat you. Or, well...>> Tom's magic swirled with deep, genuine amusement. <<...what was *left* of you.>>

Well.

So maybe Tom's honesty had not ended up being *quite* as refreshing as Harry had hoped it would be.

Rather, Harry suddenly came to the abrupt realization that, while Tom had clearly enjoyed telling Harry all of this, it was also almost certainly true that he would have genuinely enjoyed this all actually *happening*, and the knowledge shocked him enough that he wasn't really sure how to respond or really react in any way.

Harry was swiftly brought out of his shock, however, as he noticed Tom's magic suddenly reaching for him. Almost like a reflex he quickly put up an *Obice* around the diary, watching warily as Tom's magic slammed against his barrier once, twice, then went still.

Harry had a vague suspicion about what Tom had just tried to do, but confirming it didn't really seem important compared to all of the other things Harry had just learned about Tom.

Harry swallowed at the thought.

This was what Tom had been planning all along, wasn't it? When he'd been talking so *pleasantly* with Harry about working together to bring back the Dark Lord? All those nights they'd spent discussing Potions theory, or Runes, or Herbology... *this* was what Tom had planned to do, had been *wanting* to do, all that time.

And Harry had trusted Tom.

Worse, Harry had *liked* him.

Harry had known, obviously, that Tom wasn't a kind student who was just put in the diary to help future generations. He'd *known* that Tom was capable of being dangerous. But the thing was, Harry was capable of being dangerous. Harry's friends were capable of being dangerous. Tom being *capable* of being dangerous simply hadn't seemed like an issue.

But Tom wasn't just *capable* of being dangerous, he'd actively been planning to kill Harry all this

time.

No, that wasn't even it. Planning to kill Harry would have been one thing; Harry would have been perfectly willing to understand that a life needed to be sacrificed for Voldemort to be resurrected, it sounded like a reasonable exchange rate. He wouldn't have agreed with it, but he would have at least understood where Tom was coming from. But this...

Harry knew exactly how terrifying and horrific his death would have been. Slow and agonizingly painful, a true nightmarish hell that would have had Harry wishing he *was* dead, just more quickly. And the thing was, while Harry suspected it probably wouldn't have been as directly painful as *Reformatio*, there was something about having all of his limbs torn off by a basilisk and then having to lay there as a helpless *stump* as Tom slowly drained him of all of his magic through his blood until it killed him, that Harry suspected would have made the whole experience significantly worse psychologically.

But it was worse than that, because from what Harry could tell, not only was Tom clearly aware of how horrific and psychologically agonizing Harry's death would have been, but all he seemed to feel at the idea of it was sheer sadistic *amusement*. Not a hint of guilt or remorse, not a single drop of anything even *remotely* similar to empathy. No, just from the way Tom's magic had swirled around him as he'd explained exactly how Harry would have died, he *knew* Tom would have truly, sincerely enjoyed it. It might even be the most genuinely pleased he'd ever seen Tom's magic look up until now, and wasn't that a terrifying thought? That the thing that Tom wanted most as far as Harry was concerned was to have his limbs torn off by a basilisk?

*Tom was insane.*

Harry felt like a cold bucket of water had been poured over him at the thought. This was it, then. He had to kill Tom, because Tom was insane.

Except that...that wasn't *quite* right. Harry wasn't going to kill Tom because he was insane; Tom being insane was definitely a problem, but it wasn't really the *issue*. It wasn't because he'd been planning to kill Harry, either; planning to kill Harry was arguably the least insane aspect of all of this, the one Harry had the least issues with.

No, Harry would have to kill Tom, because Tom was incapable of *controlling himself*.

He'd had a perfect ally in Harry, had had no *reason* to betray him like this, except for the fact that, clearly, Tom had *wanted* to do this. It was obvious that he simply hadn't been able to *stop* himself from doing all of this, even though it was obviously a *stupid thing to do*.

Tom was a sadistic, murderous, backstabbing *idiot* who couldn't *control himself*, and Harry would now have to kill him.

Harry carefully placed his hands back within the barrier, coating his hands with Obice as he watched Tom's magic attempt to approach once again, and be held back. It was fairly difficult to hold this kind of barrier properly, especially with Harry's magic as weak as it was and while he was also using his power to keep himself numb, which was why he hadn't been doing so earlier. But if Harry's suspicions were correct, then this barrier was absolutely necessary for now.

<It is clear that we cannot cooperate any longer.> Harry paused for a moment in his writing, trying to verbalize what he was currently feeling. Part of him expected to feel at least some anger, maybe fear, but really, *all* he was feeling was frustration. Frustration at all the time he'd wasted, all the things he'd have to change, all the things he'd have to *do* now that Tom was out of the picture, because *Voldemort* was out of the picture. His plans had just become infinitely more annoying to

carry out, all because Tom was *stupid*. Stupid, all of this was just *stupid*. <I am...upset at what you did, I won't lie, but I want you to know that I am not making this decision out of anger. I am doing this because you betrayed me, and you are too dangerous a person to work with if I cannot trust you. I want you to know that *you* brought this upon yourself.>

The diary's magic had stopped shifting around him and only tiny little flickers could be seen near the edge. Tom was clearly deeply unsettled by Harry's words, and he tried to ram through Harry's barrier once again, but it held. Harry's power and focus were fragile, but Tom was almost impossibly weak at the moment, which was the only reason Harry was even risking talking to him at this point.

To be honest, Harry wasn't really sure why he even *wanted* to talk to Tom at this point; perhaps he felt it was fair to give Tom some kind of closure before Harry actually killed him.

*Honesty for honesty.*

<<You cannot harm me. This diary is indestructible.>>

A shock of amusement suddenly ran through Harry at his words. It was similar to Harry's usual reaction to Tom's indignant claims, but *distinctly* more sadistic in nature.

<Unfortunately for you, I did read through quite a few of your notes, and I know that that's not true.>

From the way Tom's magic abruptly began to struggle against Harry's barrier once again, it was obvious that Tom did not appreciate his honesty.

*Honesty for honesty, Tom didn't really like that, did he?*

Harry felt a grimace of a smile suddenly form on his face, sharp and twisted and ugly.

*Then how about cruelty for cruelty?*

<Would you like to make a bet, Tom?>

Tom's magic abruptly went completely and utterly still.

<<What do you mean?>>

<Well, I was thinking earlier that I could take my time figuring out a weakness to this diary now that I'm in Slytherin's library, with all his books and where you've so kindly left me all of your research on soul containers. But honestly, that seems kind of boring now. You see, Tom, talking about the basilisk reminded me of a very fun idea I had earlier for an experiment.> Harry's magic thrummed with murderous intent. <You've always been so brilliant, Tom, and clearly you enjoy things being ripped, so how about you give me a hypothesis? Do you think you will survive if every single particle that makes up this diary gets ripped apart?>

Now, Harry knew that Tom could feel his sincerity through his barrier, but even if he hadn't been able to, Tom knew very well that Harry was not the kind of person to threaten someone's life as a joke. He was also smart enough to realize that Harry was not just referencing the basilisk for comedic purposes; Harry was letting him know that his experiment had been concocted while fighting the basilisk, which, given that the basilisk was dead, meant that what Harry was threatening to do was likely strong enough to kill a creature like that. Besides, even if Tom didn't know anything about physics, he'd still be able to grasp the idea that having every particle of this diary getting ripped apart *probably* wouldn't end well for him, especially when a basilisk had

gotten killed through a similar method.

*He would understand the physics behind Iugo and Fies so easily, he would understand how my magic works without a single problem; we would have been able to work so well together.* Harry thought bitterly. *We would have worked so well together, if only he wasn't such a sadistic, arrogant idiot.*

To be honest, Harry expected Tom to barrage him with insults at this point, or begin ramming into his barrier again, to react to his words with anger and denial and violence.

But instead, Tom's magic abruptly curled into itself, in a motion distinctly different to any Harry had seen him make before. Tom looked like he was trying to make himself look as small as possible, his magic shivering noticeably as he pulled it within the pages of the diary, like he was trying to hide within the physical confines of his container.

Fear. Tom was feeling fear.

No, that wasn't quite right.

That was *terror*. Tom was *terrified*.

<<I'm being forced to betray you, I didn't want to do it! I swear I can explain, please!>>

Harry blinked.

He'd expected a few things, but this...definitely wasn't it.

Was Tom really saying he didn't *want* to do this? Saying he'd been *forced* to betray Harry?

After everything that had happened, *now* he wanted to *talk*?

The notion was so ridiculous it was downright laughable. The things Tom had intended to do, that Harry knew he'd *wanted* to do, were horrifying, monstrous, and Tom clearly felt no remorse or guilt about *any* of it. '*Say hi to the basilisk for me*', Tom's last words to Harry, a lovely little parting joke in the face of his death. No, not *just* his death, just his death would have been *fine*, but *no*. This would have been his gruesome, horrific maiming, and then his slow death in a way that both Tom and Harry knew would have been simultaneously terrifying and absolutely excruciating. So this, this was a terrible, pathetic attempt at a joke, really, and Harry would have laughed in Tom's face if he'd had one. Except...

...except that Harry was hesitating in just dismissing Tom's words outright, specifically *because* Harry's first reaction had been to want to laugh in his face about it.

The thing was, Harry remembered that feeling of anger a few minutes ago, that sudden desire to *hurt* Tom that had come and gone so suddenly, to hurt him like he'd hurt Harry. How he'd decided to make a cruel joke out of killing Tom because he'd felt like Tom deserved cruelty, deserved to suffer. How he'd *wanted* Tom to suffer, because he'd made *Harry* suffer. How he'd wanted *revenge*.

And knowing that he'd *wanted* to hurt Tom, *wanted* revenge, made Harry hesitate.

Because the thing was, if Harry was going to kill Tom, he wanted it to be because Tom was useless and a danger to his plans, not for revenge. Revenge was about returning pain for the sake of returning pain, about wanting to hurt someone because they'd hurt you, about wanting to feel better, not because it would actually lead to anything useful or help your goals. And yes, maybe

wanting revenge could be excused, but...

But Harry killing Tom without even hearing his explanation would be *getting* revenge, and getting revenge meant acting irrationally, illogically, impulsively.

*Getting* revenge meant losing control.

And more than anything, Harry *refused* to lose control.

Not at this point. Not when he'd come this far.

No, with all of his plans on the line, Harry needed to be completely, fully certain that he wasn't choosing to kill Tom because of something as stupid as it being *revenge*, as it making Harry *feel better*. He had to have as much information as possible to make a decision this important, because killing Tom was not something he could take back. Killing Tom because he was insane and couldn't control himself would have been one thing, Harry would have been fine with that. But if Tom had a real justification for his actions, however small the chance of that may be...

Harry had to at least hear it.

Taking Harry's silence as permission to explain, clearly fully aware that he was on thin, thin ice, Tom instantly began writing.

<<I am a part of Voldemort's soul, but I am not Voldemort himself. I may be the soul of a human, but as a soul within a soul container, I am not a human, and I do not have free will. For as long as I am in this soul container I cannot disobey my creation ritual's orders, which include trying to absorb all of the magic of anyone who writes to me and killing them, at any cost, and I cannot stop myself from attempting to do so. I am being forced to betray you, I swear it on my magic.>>

Harry read over Tom's words carefully, taking in Tom's explanation. He read it over again, and then again.

Part of Harry would have *liked* to say he felt nothing but skepticism at Tom's suspiciously convenient excuse, but Harry didn't like lying to himself, and that wasn't quite true. Harry's magic, however, had no such compunctions, and it relaxed almost instantly around him, relieved to have any reason not to have to kill Tom.

*Traitor. He literally just tried to kill us, twice. At least pretend to have some self-preservation around him*, Harry thought at it irritably, knowing it couldn't understand him and almost certainly wouldn't have cared even if it could. Harry had realized early on that his magic was really strangely fond of Tom for reasons that Harry couldn't really understand; he was pretty sure it was a capability of the diary, but he wasn't *entirely* certain of that. And he'd been fine with it before, hadn't really cared that much, but the fact that his magic was *still* fond of Tom even after everything that had happened really just felt like his suffering was being directly mocked.

Probably sensing his irritation, and thinking it was about him, Tom hurried to continue explaining.

<<I know you doubt me, and I fully understand why, but I swear on my magic I am telling you the truth. If you read my notes further, you will see that I am bound by the restriction of how this diary was created. You are right to be angry, and what I planned to do was... monstrous and horrific, it is true, but as long as I exist as this diary I will be forced to complete my Prime Objective, and I can do nothing against it.>>

Well, at least Tom recognized that what he'd wanted to do was 'monstrous and horrific'. That was a good sign, right? <What is your objective, then?>

<<To acquire enough power to create a body for myself. I am incapable of discriminating anything about my targets other than whether a person is magical or not. Once a witch or wizard writes to me, they are marked, and I am bound to do everything in my power to absorb all of their magic and kill them.>>

Harry frowned. <Why would Voldemort...why would *you* have created something like this? A soul container whose only purpose is to get a body by killing those who write to you? Everyone who writes to you, even?>

Tom's magic curled further into itself, the shivers growing more pronounced. << I have always been terrified of dying, and this diary was created with the express purpose of helping me come back to life in case something happened to me in the future. I...do not know all the specifics, since I do not share all of Voldemort's memories, but...I genuinely believe that taking one person's life through absorbing their magic is the only method that would work for me to obtain a body and become human again. The reason I forced myself to target everyone who writes to me is to prevent the possibility of someone finding loopholes in my Objective that might render me incapable of killing anyone, which would have made creating me completely pointless. It was not an ideal solution, but it was the best I could come up with. >> A pronounced shiver ran through him, terror clear in the motion. <<Trying to kill you specifically was completely out of my control, I *swear*.>>

Harry turned away from the diary, reaching out to the pile of notes on the desk that he hadn't read yet.

Tom creating this diary because he was terrified of death was one thing. Harry didn't agree with the idea of sacrificing an innocent person's life to secure his own, but he understood the sentiment; it was a very human thing to want to avoid death at all costs, and compared to what Harry stood to lose by *not* working with Voldemort it really was a negligible issue, especially given that Tom hadn't even succeeded. Many people killed for material possessions or status; the Ministry killed for hatred, prejudice, power, money...Harry didn't even know. It all felt equally senseless to him, the amount of lives that had been ruined or lost in the Ministry's pursuit of...eradicating the Dark, absolute power, *whatever* they were after.

Compared to that, Tom trying to kill Harry because he didn't want to die just...wasn't a big deal to Harry. What was more, Tom being *forced* to kill Harry because he *couldn't* discriminate between who he chose to kill and who he chose to cooperate with meant that Tom genuinely *hadn't* betrayed Harry, he'd had no choice in the matter at all.

But if Tom was lying, Harry would have to destroy him. If Harry had been someone who hated the Dark Lord that would have been one thing, but Harry had promised to help Tom, had been actively helping him according to the diary's own instructions, and yet still Tom had lured him into the Chamber with the sole intent of killing him for his power. It was simply too dangerous, too unpredictable, to try to work with someone who would rather kill Harry than even *try* and figure out an alternative method of resurrection. If Tom would rather kill Harry than cooperate with him, no matter what, then there was no point in keeping him alive, Voldemort or not. Harry knew he would still be able to help bring the Dark and Light powers into balance, even without Voldemort's help. It would take more time, it would be much harder, and it was likely that many more people would suffer, but if Voldemort could not be trusted to control himself, then he would always be more of a hindrance than a help, anyways.

Harry needed to find out what the truth was.

It took him around ten minutes, but he eventually found what he was looking for; a large section that detailed the way the soul container would behave given certain situations, and then, to the

side, a paragraph that had been highlighted carefully.

*One must keep in mind that the soul container is as its name implies; a container. A creator may attempt to give it true life, autonomy, but that is a pointless exercise. At best it is as a wizard's portrait, life-like and capable of deceiving an uninformed observer. At worst, it is as a puppet, dancing forever on its conductor's strings. But no matter what it does or how it is designed, the soul will never be able to escape its Prime Objective. For as long as it remains in the container, it will follow its creator's will; nothing more, and nothing less.*

And then, scribbled slightly further down:

*Prime Objective: Absorb all of the magic of anyone who writes in this diary and use it to create a body for the soul.*

Harry read through the whole thing multiple times, making sure he was missing nothing. Eventually he had to admit that the message was impossible to misinterpret; Tom was not lying.

Harry took a moment to re-center himself, taking in a deep breath as he leaned back in the armchair.

Part of Harry was genuinely glad that Tom wasn't lying. It meant that there was still hope for Harry to be able to cooperate with Voldemort in the future. It meant his plans weren't completely destroyed. It meant that he could still work with Tom because killing Harry really *had* been Tom's Prime Objective, which meant it was completely out of his control.

Harry sighed.

In spite of the objective being outside of Tom's control, the manner in which he had carried out his plan was still hard to accept. Because Harry knew that, forced to or not, Tom would truly, genuinely have *enjoyed* carrying out his plan.

The thing was, Tom hadn't just been *pretending* to be merciless and sadistic to scare Harry earlier; Tom had no idea that Harry could see his magic, and even if he *had* known, there was simply no way for him to control the way his magic reacted to his own emotions, not to that extent. He might have been able to stifle it, or subdue it, but pretending to enjoy ripping Harry apart limb from limb...no, his deep amusement at the prospect of Harry's death was completely, undeniably *honest*.

Which meant that, if Harry was to continue with his plan to bring Voldemort back to power, he had to take two things into account. Firstly, he had to accept that Tom lacked empathy, seemingly entirely, for the death and suffering of people around him; if anything, he seemed to enjoy it, to find amusement in it. He was also, at the very least, perfectly willing to torture and kill innocents - and supporters - to achieve his goals. He lied easily and convincingly, and felt no remorse for the monstrous things he had done, or was planning to do. Insane or not, Tom was undeniably a terrible person.

Secondly, Harry had to accept that Voldemort *was* Tom. And that meant that there was a distinct possibility that Voldemort was every bit as terrible a person as Tom was, and had always been. There *was* the possibility that the soul container was directly affecting Tom's personality, but given that Tom the Human had *created* this soul container in the first place Harry doubted that was the case. There was also the memory he'd been shown and his talk with Slughorn. In retrospect, it

seemed extremely likely that Tom had been the one to attack the students fifty years ago after opening the Chamber, and he'd later simply decided to frame Hagrid to cast suspicions off himself. Harry wasn't clear on the details, obviously, but he was starting to wonder if the acromantula had even existed at all, or if Tom had just made it up and then *conveniently* scared it away before anyone could confirm whether it *really* had been the creature to attack the students. In any case, both those facts implied that Tom the Human was, at the very least, not *better* than Tom the Diary.

However, even if he accepted these two points, there were still a few things that Harry had questions about. Primarily, what would explain what Voldemort had been like as a politician? The Dark Lord Voldemort that Harry had read about, the one that the Dark and Light Families had followed, the one that everyone back then spoke about so reverently... he had been intelligent, charming and powerful, yes. But, most importantly, he had also been *good*. He'd worked for equality, for raising awareness, for bringing the magical community together under the umbrella of understanding and education. He'd been a promoter of equal rights for Dark and Light families, of peace between the two factions, of mutual respect and cooperation. He'd wanted to help Magical Britain, wanted to help children at Hogwarts, wanted to help Muggleborns to adapt more easily to their systems. He'd wanted to help spread information about magical creatures so that people wouldn't treat them like dangerous beasts, he'd wanted to give them rights, respect. Before his descent into insanity, Voldemort been a exemplary human being with whom no one, and certainly not Harry, could find any significant faults.

In other words, it didn't seem possible that someone like Tom could *become* someone like Voldemort in, what, ten years? Never mind the time, Harry didn't think it was possible at *all*.

But evidently Tom *was* Voldemort, so how could that be?

Harry looked at the diary, considering it carefully.

"Did you fake it all?" Harry asked quietly. "Were you just pretending to be good so you could get into a position of power?"

The idea was fairly believable. As much as Tom seemingly had no empathy, he certainly *appeared* to understand Harry's emotions pretty well, and was adept at using them to his advantage. He certainly hadn't had any issues convincing Harry that they were allies initially, and he easily would have succeeded in killing him if it hadn't been for Harry's own unique magic. According to Slughorn everyone in Hogwarts had considered Tom a model student, brilliant and charming, and given that knowledge, the idea that Tom had simply convinced everyone in Europe that Voldemort was his real personality was also fairly easy to believe. It was also fairly easy to believe that he'd simply used 'Voldemort' and his 'good' goals to gain a position of power, and his 'becoming insane' was just him finally doing what he'd really wanted to do all along.

Except...that didn't really make sense, either. Because Voldemort *had* reached a position of power, and he *still* hadn't done anything awful. Even when he'd been arguably the most powerful man in Europe, he'd *still* worked for all of those same goals. At the peak of his power, he'd still been *good*. It had taken nearly ten years for the 'insanity' to really take control of him enough that the war had started, and Voldemort's power and influence had decreased substantially due to Voldemort secluding *himself* during those years. If Tom had been malicious and he hadn't been going insane, there would have been no reason for the seclusion. And if Tom had been malicious *and* had been going insane, he still could have simply began the war earlier, at the peak of his power and influence, *and* while he was still in control of his faculties.

In other words, if Tom had been malicious all along and simply been using 'Voldemort' and being 'good' as an excuse, he could have *easily* done a *lot* more damage.

Harry looked at Tom again.

What was real? What was an excuse? What was Tom really planning? Had he begun with those goals as an excuse and then become attached to them in some way later on? Was Tom actually a good person hiding beneath a mask of a sadistic murderer...for....some... reason? Or had Voldemort just been faking being good all along to reach a completely different goal?

Most importantly, did it matter?

The answer to that, as far as Harry was concerned, was 'No'. It didn't really matter to him if Voldemort had been faking it all along. It didn't really matter what Tom's real personality was. In the end, Voldemort's motivations and Tom's desires wouldn't matter.

Because Tom was terrified of dying, enough that he'd created a soul container in which he'd put a part of his own soul just in case something ever happened to him. And because Tom was Voldemort, it was logical to assume that he, too, was terrified of dying.

And that meant that they could be controlled, that Harry's plan could still go on as usual.

With *some* adjustments.

If Voldemort was uncontrollably insane, Harry would kill him, same as before. But if Voldemort was sane - or at least perfectly capable of acting like it - and simply refused to cooperate, there were now two options.

The first option was still the same as before. If Voldemort returned sane and good, and simply didn't want to cooperate with Harry due to something like Harry being a child, or some other benign reason, that would actually be fine. That was option number one, Harry just convincing him to carry out Harry's plans eventually, either by logic or by showing him how powerful of an ally Harry could be, figuratively and literally. And even if Voldemort still refused to do what Harry asked, for no real reason, Harry was still fine with leaving him alive to do what he'd done before. He'd simply keep watch over Voldemort to make sure he didn't *become* insane again, and that would be that. Voldemort's goals aligned with Harry's enough that that would still be worth all of the trouble he was going to now; a good, sane Voldemort would almost certainly want - and be able - to stop the Ministry's idiocy all by himself, and that was all Harry really wanted, anyways.

The brand new second option was that Voldemort refused to cooperate because he really was as cruel and murderous as Tom appeared to be. If he was at least capable of controlling himself, Harry would first threaten to kill him to get his cooperation. Given Tom's reaction to the possibility of dying, Harry felt relatively certain that he could control even someone like Voldemort if it came down to it. It wouldn't be what Harry wanted - he'd definitely prefer them to cooperate willingly - but it would do. And if threats didn't work, or if Voldemort was simply so cruel and murderous that Harry couldn't trust him at *all*, then Harry would simply kill him and figure something else out.

And the same thing went for Tom. If Harry threatening to kill him meant that Tom 'behaved', then Harry was willing to do that. If Harry could figure out a way to ensure that Tom didn't *actually* betray him in the future, then working with him was still his best option. Because if the possibility existed that he could still use Voldemort, Harry was willing to risk his life around Tom to see it happen.

Because the thing was, at the end of the day, Harry was trying to stop a war. If he took too long with his plans, the chances of many, *many* people dying went up exponentially, many of them his friends and their families. Risking his life to potentially save the lives of so many other people just

didn't seem like such an extreme idea; if someone's life needed to be sacrificed to stop a war, Harry was willing to accept that it might just have to be his own. He didn't *want* to die, obviously, but while he didn't see why it *had* to be him, he also didn't see any reason why it *couldn't* be him, either. Life was like a chemical reaction; you could control the reactants, and you could control the product, but you couldn't control which specific molecules would be the ones getting consumed in the process. And really, this was all just one huge chemical experiment as far as Harry was concerned. Wizarding Britain was the initial solution, Harry was the main reactant, and Voldemort was the catalyst; without Harry no reaction would take place, but without Voldemort there might as well not even *be* an experiment in the first place, it would take so long to work. And if using the catalyst meant that Harry was risking being fully consumed by the reaction, well, that was something he'd always known could happen.

He didn't *want* it to happen, but he knew it could. And that was fine, it was a risk he was willing to take.

*Maybe my magic's lack of self-preservation around Tom is affecting me.* Harry thought with morbid amusement. *Or maybe just nearly killing myself twice has affected my perception of what's an 'acceptable risk' in regards to all my plans.*

Harry rubbed at his temple with his right hand. He had a mild headache, and he wasn't sure if that was due to his extensive magic use, having hit his head against the wall after being thrown by the basilisk, or just realizing how annoying everything was now going to be. He didn't *think* he had a concussion, but he'd have to watch out for that too, he supposed.

In any case, Harry was once again leaning towards still trying to cooperate with Tom. Or maybe not cooperating *with* necessarily; he supposed holding someone hostage by threatening their life wasn't really cooperation. But then again, Tom had been planning to kill him from the start, so it wasn't like this had ever really been a cooperation to begin with. Still. They would be 'working together towards a common goal'. Maybe one of them was being forced to do it, but that person had also tried to kill the other first, so it felt fair regardless. Harry was willing to consider it, in any case.

But first, he had to confirm something that he'd been suspecting since earlier.

<Why did you even tell me about your plans with the basilisk just then? You had to know that that would only make your claim that you're being 'forced to betray me' less believable.>

Tom's magic flinched. <<You already know why I did it. You set up that barrier because you knew I would try to possess you and kill you while you were still in shock about...all of that. Although how you knew, I'm still not certain.>>

Well. More honesty that wasn't really *refreshing*, but as weird as it was to think it, what Tom had told him was actually *good* news. It meant that Tom hadn't told him about how he'd wanted to rip Harry's limbs off earlier just because he was feeling sadistic or angry; which only further assuaged Harry's fears that Tom couldn't control himself. No, Tom had just wanted to shock Harry into getting killed, which while not good for Harry's *health*, was further proof that Tom was only acting 'stupidly' when he was being forced to by his objective, which meant it was good for Harry's *plans*.

And the thing was, it really had almost worked, too. Even with Harry being capable of seeing Tom's magic directly, he'd still not really realized what Tom was doing. Tom telling him every gory detail of what he'd planned to do to him really *had* affected Harry's mental state enough that it had taken him a few moments to react when Tom's magic moved towards him. Harry had put up a barrier more out of reflex than anything. If Tom had been just a little less weak, had been just a

little bit faster in reaching out, if Harry had taken just a moment longer to actually really think about what Tom was doing, if he hadn't been capable of seeing Tom's magic at all...he'd almost certainly be dead within moments.

Which...if Tom was acting rationally, he wouldn't want, actually.

<What exactly would your plan have been once you had control?>

Tom's magic flinched again. <<I was planning on having you stab yourself in the jugular with the quill you are currently using to write, and then having you bleed out onto the diary. Once I absorbed some of your magic through your blood I would have been able to maintain the possession forcefully, since you would have been dying at the same time.>>

<But what if you hadn't had enough time to absorb all of my magic before I died, what would you have done then? Just sit here for the rest of time?>

<<It wouldn't have really mattered if you'd died before I had the chance to take *all* of your magic, and hadn't been able to create a body. This diary has the capability to teleport itself to a few specific locations, the closest one to this Chamber being a shelf in the Hogwarts Library. The only issue with that is that activating the ritual through the various anti-teleportation wards in Hogwarts takes quite a bit of magic, more than the average wizard possesses in the entirety of their core. I was aware that that would be an issue, so I gave this diary the capacity to absorb and store large quantities of ambient magic; it is a very slow process, however, and even with how rich the ambient magic in this Chamber is it would probably still take me about a decade to absorb enough power to activate the teleportation ritual. That being said, the ritual only really exists so that in an emergency I would not be trapped somewhere endlessly; compared to how long I would likely remain trapped in here otherwise, a decade is not too long to wait.>>

Harry blinked. The ritual sounded very interesting indeed, especially the part about it being able to get around the anti-teleportation wards in Hogwarts; Harry was *very* interested in learning more about that.

More importantly, however, learning of the ritual once again reassured Harry that Tom really wasn't being impulsive or stupid about any of this at all, and in fact had designed this entire plan with an almost alarming amount of attention to detail, something which Harry could appreciate now that he wasn't in imminent danger of being killed by said plan. Hopefully.

But the rest...

Harry gave the quill in his hand a dubious look. He really *wasn't* that bothered by learning how exactly Tom had planned to kill him, but...well, maybe just a tiny bit. At least Tom hadn't looked *excited* at the prospect of killing him with a quill, clearly still too terrified of getting killed to feel particularly sadistic at the moment.

<Is there no way to stop you from trying to kill me constantly?>

<<Unfortunately, I genuinely have no control over myself in regards to that while I am within this soul container. Until I get a body, I will be forever bound by my objective, and forever be attempting to kill you.>>

<What about the month and a half between today and when I first found you? You weren't constantly trying to kill me then.>

<<The objective is not about me killing you in the moment, but about me believing I am actively

working towards killing you in the near future. My main killing method, like what I was doing to Ginny, would take a few months to carry out in the first place. What that means is that even if I am not actively causing you harm in the moment, I will always be acting in accordance to my belief that my actions will lead to your death within, at most, a few months.>>

Harry frowned. He knew Tom was telling the truth, because they both knew that that answer was not a good one as far as Harry deciding to keep Tom alive was concerned. Harry could *feel* the fear pouring out of Tom as he wrote back, his sheer terror, because in being honest he was taking a huge risk; he was still waiting for Harry to come to a decision about the veracity of his earlier statement, to come to a decision about whether Tom would be allowed to live at all, and Tom was hoping that being honest and open about everything now, no matter how bad it made him look, was the way to convince Harry of his willingness to cooperate.

But the thing was, Tom being willing to cooperate wasn't as important as him being *capable* of cooperating. If he couldn't control himself from constantly trying to kill Harry, either because he was completely insane *or* because he was being forced to by his soul container, what was his willingness worth? Harry may *want* to work with Tom, but would it be possible?

<If there is truly no way for you to control yourself, then I am not sure how I could possibly have a use for you.>

Tom's magic began jerking in small, twitchy motions with what was clearly barely suppressed panic.

<<Please wait! Please, just give me a few minutes, I can come up with something, *please*.>>

A few minutes. Harry was willing to risk his life to bring his plans to fruition; he could certainly wait a few minutes.

<For your own sake, I hope you are right.>

Tom did not answer, but his magic settled ever so slightly as he began to think furiously. No more than two minutes later, a single message appeared.

<<I believe I have an idea, please give me a little while longer.>>

Tom didn't write again for another few minutes after that message, but Harry didn't mind that either. Knowing Tom *had* come up with something was important, which was obviously why Tom had written him that message at all.

Then, finally, words began appearing.

<<The thing is, I should not be able to talk to you like this. Telling you about my objective and about my plans to kill you and that I am a part of Voldemort's soul is not something that I am usually capable of doing. It is not directly disallowed by my objective, but it is one of the many minor restrictions imposed on my will by the soul container as another way of preventing loopholes, but the fact that I am telling you this now means that it is not a perfect system. Either I made a mistake when creating this soul container, or soul containers as a whole have a very clear weakness that I am fairly certain we can exploit to give me control over my actions, and that weakness is that soul containers depend on the perceptions and beliefs of the souls within them to enforce their restrictions. One example of how this can be exploited is that, since my objective could possibly be interpreted as needing just to 'obtain a body', I will do my best to genuinely believe that by cooperating with you I will be able to reach that goal, and through that subvert some of the restrictions placed upon my will by the soul container. However, the crucial part of

this exploit is that completing my objective is contingent on my own survival, which means survival must, technically, always be my first priority. In other words, knowing you will kill me if I place your life in danger creates a loophole in my restrictions that will allow me to fight against fulfilling the objective of my soul container enough to cooperate with you, just like your sincere threat to kill me just now allowed me to tell you all of this.>>

There Tom stopped writing, and his magic tightened even further into itself. It was clear that this was all he had to offer, and he did not look sure of his chances in the least.

Harry read it all over carefully a few times, but eventually he found himself frowning in disappointment. That was simply not quite as good a plan as he'd been hoping for, and it was easy for him to spot quite a few ways this could all easily go wrong, which explained why Tom didn't look particularly convinced by it either. That being said, Harry couldn't find it in himself to be upset with Tom for not openly pointing out his plan's weaknesses; in spite of what had happened, Harry could not help but feel pity over how clearly terrified the other boy was of dying.

But Harry had not let his desire for revenge get in the way of his plans earlier, and he was not about to let pity do that either.

<I understand that you may be able to fight your objective through this, but it seems like it depends on too many factors to be consistent. The fact of the matter is that I will need to be communicating with you rather often if all of this is to work, and being able to fight against your objective *most* of the time still puts me in quite a bit of danger whenever you fail. I'm not really sure this is enough, not when a single mistake on your part could easily cost me my life.>

Tom's magic began shivering dramatically, renewed terror filling him at Harry's doubts. <<Wait, please, please give me a chance! Although I cannot guarantee that I will always be able to fight against my objective perfectly, I promise that I *can* stop myself from ever possessing you, and that from this moment onward I will always be as honest as possible with you! I will never voluntarily deceive you, if I ever find myself planning to kill you, I will do my best to make it obvious to you, and if possible directly tell you what I am planning to do. Given that you already know what my objective is, it would be extremely difficult for me to trick you into anything if I do that. That way I will never truly place you in danger, and you will have no need to kill me! I *genuinely* believe that through this method I will be able to cooperate with you properly, so please->> His magic curled into itself again, tightly, and shivered with terror. <<-please don't kill me.>>

Despite his words, it was clear that Tom was convinced that there was no longer any hope for him. That Harry was going to kill him, no matter what he said.

But that...that wasn't *quite* true. Because what Tom had just told Harry was crucial information as far as cooperation between them went; that as long as Harry posed a genuine threat to his life, Tom believed he could fight against the soul container's restrictions enough to actually *promise* that he would never try to possess Harry. And that promise was actually incredibly significant, for three reasons.

The first one was that possessing Harry was pretty much the only way in which Tom could really, truly put Harry's life in danger at this point. Tom was weaker than Harry in every way possible, and as Tom had pointed out, trying to trick Harry into putting himself in danger would be extremely hard to do now that Harry knew what his objective was. If Tom simply never possessed Harry, then the risk he posed to Harry's life decreased dramatically, practically to negligible levels if Tom was also always doing his best to be honest about any slips in his control.

But the important thing wasn't that Harry believed that Tom's words were necessarily the *truth*. No, what was important was the *intention* behind the promise.

Which came to the second reason the promise was important; that if Tom ever *actually* tried to possess Harry, Harry would take that as proof that Tom *couldn't* control his objective in spite of his best efforts, and be fully confident in his decision to kill him then.

This was important because, apart from that, Harry had no real way to judge if Tom was ever telling the truth about fighting his objective. Now, the things he'd told Harry about the soul container's weakness and the exploit made *sense*, which was why Harry was willing to believe him at all, but the issue was that if at any point Tom decided to actually betray Harry and tried to kill him voluntarily, he could always just claim it was the objective forcing him to do it and never have to fear for the consequences. And while this was still true for the most part, Harry didn't really care too much about that in general due to the first reason; which was to say, that the only real threat to Harry's life at this point was Tom possessing him. And Tom obviously knew this, so if Tom every genuinely wanted to betray Harry, pretty much the only thing he *would* do would be to try to possess him.

And if Harry had kept Tom alive and Tom hadn't made a promise that he could stop himself from ever possessing Harry, then every time Tom tried to possess Harry and failed, Harry would have had to chose between risking killing Tom unfairly, or make the decision to keep trusting that Tom really had just make another mistake, all the while *knowing* that there was simply no way to know if he was making the right choice. And if Tom was actually genuinely never trying to betray Harry, then he too would be living in constant fear that a mistake would cost him his life, because there was literally no way for him to convince Harry that he *wasn't* betraying him, not in a way that counted. And that complete incapability for either of them to have *any* trust in each other would have made it impossible for them to cooperate in the long run, no matter what.

But now, *with* this promise, if Tom *ever* tried to possess Harry, Harry would know that he was either being betrayed or that Tom simply wasn't capable of fighting his objective properly, and kill him at that point without having to doubt his decision for a moment.

And that was why the third reason was the most important one, Tom's intentions behind making a promise in the first place. Because by Tom making Harry a *promise* - rather than just making an assertion - Tom was essentially giving Harry permission to kill him if he ever tried to possess Harry, even if he'd just made a mistake, and preemptively absolving Harry of all fault in that situation.

And *that* was incredibly important.

Because what Tom's promise was actually doing was *creating* the tiny amount of trust between them that was necessary for them to be able to cooperate with each other at all. And to that end, Tom was giving Harry control over the most valuable thing he possessed - his life - as proof of that trust.

But the thing was...Tom's promise was obviously just too little, too late.

Even after all of those reasons, Harry would still be putting himself in unnecessary danger if he let Tom live. And, given that Harry was already threatening to kill him, Tom being willing to bet his life on his promise was practically meaningless.

That tiny amount of trust in exchange for his life...it was all Tom had to offer, but it really just wasn't worth much.

And as far as Tom was concerned it just obviously wasn't *enough*. Tom would never risk his own life for a promise like that, and so he couldn't see why Harry would either.

Tom knew he *should* get killed, and he was sure that Harry agreed.

But...

But Harry wasn't Tom.

And to him, that tiny amount of trust *was* enough.

To Harry, that one promise contained all the reasons he needed to believe that Tom should be kept alive, that Tom was *worth* keeping alive. Because in giving Harry that promise, that tiny trust, Tom had not only offered Harry everything he *had* to offer, he had also given Harry the only thing Harry *needed*: a precaution.

Because Harry really didn't want to have to carry out his plans on his own.

Because Harry *needed* Voldemort for his plans to work efficiently, effectively, perfectly.

And while Tom's promise didn't *guarantee* Harry's safety by any means, Harry had never been looking for a guarantee in the first place. Harry had never looked for a guarantee in his *life*.

No, Tom's promise was a *safety precaution*, and as long as he had proper precautions in place - Harry had *always* been willing to go through with his experiments.

*In conclusion, all of this idiocy could have been avoided if I had just been threatening to kill him from the very beginning*, Harry thought with very, very dry amusement.

<If you got your own body, what would happen, exactly?>

It was clearly immediately obvious to Tom from what Harry had just asked that - completely against his expectation - Harry had accepted his proposal, and the sheer relief that suddenly suffused Tom was almost palpable. His magic swirled around him as he answered, lighter and less tense than Harry felt like it had looked for...a good while, if he was being honest. Maybe ever. <<Once I am free of the diary, I should no longer be bound by the creation ritual. At that point, I should have free will, since I will essentially be my own person.>>

Harry felt a little bad for damping Tom's exhilaration at still being alive, but they still had to discuss a few things before Harry fully and sincerely decided what to do with him. <You don't sound completely sure.>

<<To my knowledge, I am the first of my kind, so I lack evidence of what will happen when the time actually comes.>> Tom's magic slowly settled down as Tom regained control over his emotions, but the sense of jittery, anxious relief was still clear to see in the way it twitched around him, like he couldn't quite stop himself from fidgeting. <<However, I know that that was the intent when I was first created, so either it will happen or a mistake was made. There would be no point to creating something like me otherwise.>>

<What about resurrecting Voldemort?> Harry had noticed that Tom's objective mentioned nothing about that, which was slightly suspicious considering the circumstances.

Tom's magic went slightly stiff. <<That is something I would want to do regardless. I do not have a set method for it, but I am confident I would be able to figure something out once I had a body. I suspect the ritual already exists, actually, or at least a ritual exists that I would easily be able to modify to suit our purposes. Given that he exists as a wraith, resurrecting Voldemort is not something I think will be overly difficult to do once I have a body of my own.>>

The fact that Tom had directly admitted to not having a method meant that he was almost certainly telling the truth, because implying he wasn't useful to Harry might absolutely put him in danger again. Except that, as far as Harry was concerned, it was much more important that Tom was still telling the truth, even after the threat of *imminent* death had been removed. Besides, even if Tom didn't have a guaranteed method at the moment, having an idea of what ritual *might* work was already significantly better than what Harry had. Tom probably knew that as well, because his magic didn't look anywhere near as worried as it had before; Harry might even venture to say it looked...relaxed. Not *pleased*, necessarily, but certainly not upset.

So maybe Tom, too, was genuinely willing to work with Harry under these conditions.

With that in mind, Harry took a moment to really consider his options.

Was he *really* going to work with Tom? Was the possibility of working with Voldemort for the chance to stop a war that might never even happen really worth the risk to his safety, and possibly his life? Was he really okay with working with someone who had just tried to kill him *that* horrifically? Tom was sadistic, merciless, cruel and manipulative, a truly terrible person, and the fact that he was terrified of dying didn't negate that. He'd created a soul container with the sole purpose of killing someone else, for Merlin's sake. The idea of working with Tom should have at the very least *upset* Harry.

But the thing was, it really didn't.

Tom trying to kill him didn't really upset Harry, because the fact of the matter was that Tom had needed to kill someone to resurrect himself, and Harry had been available. Harry didn't agree with that, but it didn't *upset* him.

The method of killing him was what was really giving Harry pause, but when he really thought about it, it was...actually a rather rational plan, overall. Horrific and monstrous, maybe, but it really just made *sense*.

Because the thing was, having the basilisk rip off all of Harry's limbs was actually a rather genius way to incapacitate Harry completely without killing him, while also giving Tom access to a lot of his blood.

If Harry had no limbs, he couldn't escape or fight back, so most of the risk of needing him alive for the process of taking his magic was removed. Tom using Harry's blood as a magic conduit was also crucial, since otherwise it would have taken him months to absorb Harry's magic the way he'd been doing it to Ginny, and so his plan would have been impossible to carry out given the time-frame. But that still would not have worked if Tom hadn't explicitly been taking advantage of the coagulation properties of basilisk venom, so that Harry wouldn't bleed out before Tom had a chance to absorb his magic fully.

In other words, having the basilisk rip off all of Harry's limbs was actually just Tom killing three birds with one stone, and Harry wasn't sure he could ever be upset at Tom for planning something *that* efficient, even when Harry himself was the intended victim.

Because while Harry had always known that wanting to do something and actually choosing to do it were two very different things, he was starting to realize exactly how important that distinction was when it came to Tom specifically.

Because the more Harry thought about it, the more it became clear to him that while Tom would have greatly enjoyed Harry's suffering, he wasn't doing *any* of this due to being sadistic. Tom *was* sadistic, obviously, but that had never actually affected any of his actions; every part of his plan,

no matter how horrifying, had had a perfectly logical reason for being there, had been carefully calculated and placed with meticulous precision in exactly the right spot to best bring Tom's goals into effect. His objective might be forcing him to kill someone, but within those restrictions Tom had always acted in a perfectly rational manner, and his terrible personality didn't affect anything other than how he reacted to the things he was already planning to do in the first place.

Which meant that, while Tom might *want* to kill Harry, if Tom believed it was irrational to actually *do* it, Harry was fairly certain that he actually could genuinely be trusted not to do it.

And that thought, along with Tom's promise, was enough to fully convince Harry that he was making the right decision in choosing to keep Tom alive.

<I will help you get a body, and you will help me resurrect the Dark Lord. But if you break your promise, or if you betray me of your own volition in any way, at any point, I will kill you.>

Tom's magic went tense for a moment, before relaxing slowly once Tom realized that Harry wasn't upset with him, and was simply letting him know the terms of their agreement. <<Will you let me kill someone to acquire a physical form?>>

Harry thought about that for a moment. Was he willing to sacrifice someone for a chance to bring the Dark Lord back? Well, if an escaped death-row convict suddenly appeared in Hogwarts he'd definitely *consider* it, but otherwise, sacrificing someone for his cause wasn't something Harry wanted to do unless it was *absolutely* necessary. It would be different if a sacrifice guaranteed the war never happened, and all of the Dark families stopped suffering under the Ministry's rule - Harry was fairly sure quite a few people would actually happily volunteer if that was the case - but with just the *chance* of it, Harry couldn't justify that kind of price.

Besides, *surely* there had to be alternative. <I will find another way.>

<<There *is* no other way.>>

<Then I will *make* one.> There had to be another way. Maybe Tom didn't think another way existed, but Harry had his Latin and his magic. He could find it.

The diary was silent, its magic shifting slowly in thought. Then a single tendril flickered lightly, swooping lazily a few times, only to come to a stop in the shape of a spiral. A very strange motion all around, and Harry wasn't sure what that meant, but at the very least it didn't appear hostile. Finally, ink emerged once again.

<<I understand.>>

And with that, the terms of their agreement were sealed.

Harry sighed, feeling himself relax minutely.

Now they could *actually* start cooperating.

<To start off, I need to know as much as possible about your soul container. Do you have any more information on how you were made? What ritual was specifically used?>

Tom's magic shifted as he thought about Harry's question.

Then, a single tendril of Tom's magic flicked outwards like a tiny whip, and the motion caught Harry's attention instantly.

It was a very distinctive motion, one that Harry had noticed Tom's magic making since the first day they'd talked, and one which Harry associated with the diary's magic alone. To Harry, it was something that was almost as distinctively and uniquely 'Tom' as the pitch black shade of his magic, something Tom clearly did completely subconsciously and which didn't really seem to have any particular meaning, almost like a tic.

But as he watched the tiny tendril flick outwards again, Harry suddenly remembered that he hadn't really seen Tom's magic making that little flick for a few days now. Harry hadn't really thought much of it at the time, had easily attributed it to Tom being nervous about Harry successfully reaching the Chamber, but now...it made Harry wonder, just for a moment, about what exactly that little flick meant.

<<Everything I know is in the notes. Unfortunately I genuinely do not have all of Voldemort's knowledge, even from back then, so I am as ignorant as you are towards the specifics. There may be more information in the rest of the Library, but I remember wanting to take all the books with in-depth information on the creation of soul containers with me when I left the school in order to study them further, so I doubt you will find anything useful on that specific subject.>>

Harry sighed. Well, wasn't *that* convenient?

<<However...>>

Harry raised an eyebrow.

<However?>

<<I think I might know someone who can help us.>>

## Chapter End Notes

"Harry had a mild headache, and he wasn't sure if that was due to having used too much magic or if he'd hit his head against the wall after getting yeeted by the basilisk."

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always remember! while characters and events in this story are definitely based on their canon counterparts, they are in nooooo way mean to be the exact same. liberties have most certainly been taken with pretty much every aspect of the hp universe
canon is being non-complied *as we speak*.

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Thank you everyone so so much for all your support!!! Sincerely, I am so happy that you guys enjoy this story, your comments always make my day :D <3<3  
I really hope you enjoyed this chapter! Thank you for reading <3

# Ortu

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

## Ortu | Rising

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<Professor Slughorn?> Harry's eyebrows rose in surprise. <How can he be of help?>

<<Slughorn knows about soul containers. I talked with him about them when I was a student. I cannot remember what specifically happened during that meeting, which means I decided not to risk including it in this diary. It is very likely Slughorn knows something important.>>

Harry blinked at him. <So what do I do?>

<<Talk to him. Figure out what he knows.>>

<Surely it can't be that simple. Won't he question that I'm asking about something so Dark? What if he mentions it to someone else?>

<<He was Head of Slytherin for many years. He's used to dealing with Slytherin students asking him about Dark subjects, even dangerous ones, and he's a great resource to have at our disposal. He's also a strong proponent for student privacy, so we don't have to worry about him spreading any rumors or talking to other teachers. Even so, we do need to formulate a plan for how we will approach the topic with him. Soul containers are an extremely niche topic, so we have to come up with a believable excuse for why you even know they exist.>>

Harry nodded, shifting slightly as he considered what excuse would work in this kind of situation. The movement pulled on his shoulder and his injury gave a distinctive twinge. It wasn't painful, exactly, since his numbing spell was still active, but it abruptly reminded Harry that he really needed to get out of here and get his injuries fully treated as soon as he could. He'd kind of forgotten the urgency of the matter, getting completely absorbed with figuring out how exactly he was going to deal with Tom, but now that that was mostly settled he was once again aware that he was not, by any means, healthy at the moment.

<We can talk about that later. How do I get out of here?>

<<The Chamber may still contain relevant information for this topic, we should get as much as possible figured out while we're here.>>

<That may be true, but I also *may* not be completely unharmed.>

Tom's magic went still in surprise, then began swirling around him. <<You're hurt? Why didn't you say anything earlier? Are you seriously injured?>> A week ago Harry would probably have assumed that the way Tom's magic was swirling around him indicated he was feeling genuine concern over Harry's injuries. Now, however, it was easy to spot the way Tom's magic looked too...*interested*, so to speak, in the idea that Harry might be injured.

Harry narrowed his eyes at the diary, suspicious for a moment about whether Tom was trying to figure out if Harry was weak enough to attack. But the diary's magic didn't look aggressive in the least, merely *interested*, and Harry was pretty sure that had more to do with Tom's inherent sadism than any desire to kill Harry at the moment. Which wasn't *ideal*, either, but as long as the other boy

didn't *act* on his sadism Harry was...well, not necessarily *fine* with it, but he'd obviously just have to get used to it. It certainly wasn't Tom's fault that Harry could see his magic and tell what he was *really* feeling. Tom's questions had been perfectly normal and polite, and that was about as much as Harry could really expect from him.

<I...broke my arm pretty badly while fighting with the basilisk. Which was around two hours ago at this point, so I do need to get going.>

Tom's magic froze completely. <<You've just been sitting here for *two hours*, reading my research and talking to me...with a *broken arm*?>>

Phrasing it like that made it sound kind of ridiculous, and Harry hurried to defend himself. <It's not like I chose to be in this situation, I had to deal with you first! Besides, I set it back with magic so it's not *technically* broken anymore, and I numbed it so I'm not in pain. I'm not just being completely irresponsible about my safety.>

<<Are you trained as a Healer?>> Harry could almost feel the disbelief pouring out of the diary.

<No, but I do have *some* medical knowledge.>

Tom's magic twisted. <<How *exactly* did you set your arm back? Are you sure you did it correctly? >>

Harry wasn't sure if Tom was trying to get him killed by stalling or if he was just being condescending, but either way the questions made him frown. <I'm not going to tell you anything, so don't even try stalling. In any case, it was fine for now, but I definitely do need to see someone more qualified as soon as possible, so just tell me how to get out of here.>

Tom's magic went tense, then flicked at Harry with measured annoyance. <<I'm not *stalling*, I'm concerned you might be literally dying right now. Broken arms can be extremely dangerous, and I have no idea how you even set it yourself with magic, especially if you aren't trained as a Healer. You could have an extremely dangerous infection, or a broken artery, or any number of severe complications. I can at least *try* to help if you tell me what you did.>>

*That* caused Harry to stop for a moment. There definitely was a chance Tom was right, and Harry was already in grave danger, and so maybe his concern really *was*-

Harry shook his head. What was he thinking? Tom was sadistic and cruel, he wasn't *concerned*, he was...trying to get Harry killed by worrying about his injury? Stalling for time by...letting Harry know he *really* might be in danger?

Well, Harry dying *would* be a ten-year-long inconvenience to Tom, so it made *some* sense that he really was just trying to help. But even then, Harry just wasn't sure of how much Tom could be trusted at this point, so he decided to go with his initial instinct.

<Just tell me where the exit is, Tom.>

Tom was silent for a moment, his magic simmering lightly in frustration. Which didn't really tell Harry much about Tom's intentions with the questions, but at least it made it clear that Tom had accepted that Harry wasn't going to tell him more about his injury.

<<I have to tell you about something else, first. I am not stalling, it is related to leaving the Chamber.>>

Harry raised an eyebrow. <Go on.>

<<When you opened the entrance through the girl's bathroom, you said 'open' in front of the sink with the small snake engraving, and when you were in my memory, you heard me talking to the snake statues.>>

<Where are you going with this?>

<<I wasn't speaking in English back then. I was speaking in Parseltongue. When you opened the entrance to the girl's bathroom, you, too, were speaking in Parseltongue.>>

Harry blinked down at the diary. If this was a joke, it was a very strange one.

<I'm pretty sure I was speaking in English. I think I would notice if I was speaking in a different language, especially one I've never heard of.>

<<Parseltongue is not like normal Muggle languages. It is a magical language, originating from the language of snakes, and it not only doesn't have to be learned, it *can't* be learned, and the only known way to acquire it is to inherit it from an ancestor who is a Speaker. You didn't notice you were speaking Parseltongue because, while to other people Parseltongue sounds like hissing, to Speakers of Parseltongue it sounds indistinguishable from English. Which may sound strange, but the reason for this is because while its origin is the language of snakes, Parseltongue as a human language is a bloodline trait, and within Europe only Salazar Slytherin, who was a native English speaker, is known to have possessed the ability. As for why you've never heard of it, Slytherin's bloodline was thought to have died out even before I was born. I discovered I had the ability purely by accident, and only after a lot of research did I manage to find out its history, as well as its more distinguished traits.>>

The amount of detail in Tom's explanation might have sounded strange coming from anyone else, but Harry knew exactly what Tom was doing. Harry's constant desire for more knowledge was a weakness that Tom had never had any trouble exploiting when it suited him, and he was clearly using it now to bribe Harry into believing him about Parseltongue when there wasn't really any way for him to provide any actual proof for its existence. Which, honestly, Harry would have felt that *bribing* was an extremely manipulative and completely underhanded way of getting anyone to believe anything, not to mention completely unnecessary in most situations and as such a wretched undermining of what logic and discussions sought to achieve...except that there really just *wasn't* any proof Tom could give Harry about any of this, so bribing him was all he could do.

...which meant that there wasn't anything wrong with *getting* bribed, right? Hadn't Draco said something similar, anyways? That Slytherin could talk to snakes?

<You know, I did wonder why most doors to reach this place just required me to say 'open' to access. It seemed very unsafe.>

<<You don't really need to worry about complicated passwords when you know only your descendants can even speak the language, and even then, only some of them.>>

Harry's brow furrowed. <So am I a descendant of Slytherin, then?>

<<You must be. I don't know of any other bloodlines not from Eastern Asia that can speak it. I hadn't realized the Potter and Slytherin bloodlines were connected, but then again, ancestry is oftentimes kept hidden.>>

Maybe that would have been much more shocking to hear if Harry had ever really cared about his ancestry. Still, being a descendant of one of the Founders of Hogwarts *did* sound interesting, and maybe there were other things in the castle that could only be...

A memory suddenly popped up. <Is that why the snakes near the Common Room were calling us both Heir? Because if we can talk to them that means we must be the heirs to Slytherin? What are they?>

<<I'm not entirely sure what they are, but I believe they were created by Slytherin himself, specifically to help his Heirs.>> Tom's magic flicked at him with measured annoyance. <<But enough of that, you can ask me all the Parseltongue-adjacent questions you like when you're healed. We need to focus on getting you out of here right now.>>

Right. The whole *literally dying* thing.

<You're right, sorry. Alright, clearly I believe you about the Parseltongue, so what does that have to do with exiting the Chamber?>

<<The second bookshelf to the left of the entrance to this room is actually a secret door to a set of stairs. They lead to a concealed passage in the dungeons, near the Slytherin Dormitory. You need to say 'open' in Parseltongue in front of the bookshelf, and they will be revealed. The reason I had to explain Parseltongue to you is because you need to be able to use Parseltongue on command to open these stairs.>>

Harry frowned. <On command? What does that mean?>

<<Right now, you can't tell Parseltongue apart from English at all. With enough focus and time, you'll be able to tell them apart easily, but for now, you need to use an Image of a snake to trick your magic into thinking you are talking to an actual snake, which will make it switch your language to Parseltongue instinctively.>>

Harry's eyes widened. <This is a *magical* language, correct? Which means that my magic must activate every time I use it?> If he could just figure out what his magic was doing when he spoke Parseltongue, Harry could learn to do this *easily*.

Tom, who didn't know about Harry's magic but *did* know that Harry often took the phrase 'with enough focus and time' to mean 'let's experiment so I can figure this out *now*', instantly understood what Harry wanted to do and his magic flicked at Harry with distinct annoyance. <<Yes, but it is not a simple thing, to control your magic like that. Using an Image is crucial in the beginning, as it solidifies the inherited magical pathways so that you can later learn to use it more naturally. You don't have the time or the magic control to try and learn how to use it directly right now, so don't even think about it.>>

Harry peered at Tom stubbornly for a moment before sighing. "He's right, obviously, I shouldn't even be thinking about experimenting right now," he muttered, giving his broken arm an annoyed look. "I'll figure it out later."

He turned sideways to look at the shelf next to him, taking in all the different books that surrounded him. He now had access to so many different, unique books, that would have so much interesting information that had been lost to the ages, and likely couldn't be found anywhere else, and had been written by Salazar Slytherin himself, and...

Tom's magic snapped at him, irritated, clearly able to sense that Harry wasn't, in fact, looking for an Image.

"I'm going, I'm going," Harry shook his head. *He's such a worrywart.* "I can come back later. For now I need help, or I really *am* going to die." His arm throbbed pointedly, as if to make a point. He gingerly stood up from the chair, as carefully as he could, and began to search.

Thankfully, it only took him about a minute to find something that looked like the Image Tom had been talking about; a small snake carving on the cover of one of the books, which seemed to radiate a tiny amount of power. Harry grabbed it off the shelf and brought it over to the bookshelf Tom had indicated, raising it to eye-level and focusing carefully on the tiny serpent.

*§Open §*

For a moment nothing happened, and Harry wondered if the Parseltongue hadn't worked. But then the bookshelf gave a small rumble, and proceeded to move sideways into the wall to reveal a dark entryway.

Adrenaline suddenly shot through Harry, images of the basilisk's form uncoiling in the darkness flashing through his mind.

*Was he dead?*

However, after a few moments of nothing moving or otherwise looking suspicious in the darkness, Harry forced himself to relax.

“Bloody hell, what is *wrong* with me? Why am I such an idiot?” he berated himself. “What if there had been another basilisk in there? Why did I just *open* it without checking anything first?”

Harry knew exactly why, was the thing.

Because even though Tom had literally just tried to kill him, once they'd reached their agreement and started talking normally again - about Slughorn and Slytherin and Parseltongue and even about how Harry was clearly just being *irresponsible* about his safety - Harry had kind of just...relaxed.

Harry wasn't angry with Tom anymore, they both understood what had happened, and they both clearly felt like they'd reached a satisfying resolution to that discussion. And with that out of the way, Harry had just...started treating Tom like normal within a few minutes. And by the time the topic of using Parseltongue on command to get out of the Chamber had come up, it had just felt like a completely normal experiment to Harry, one which he'd requested Tom's assistance with because of course he had, Tom was the one who'd told him about the subject in the first place.

And because he'd requested Tom's assistance, Harry had instinctively just assumed that there was nothing for him to worry about, because Tom was brilliant and he knew what he was talking about, and he was clearly *quite* worried about Harry's safety. So, *obviously*, any instructions he gave Harry for carrying out this experiment would be designed to, as far as Tom was able, keep Harry *safe*.

Which was such an inexplicably stupid assumption for Harry to be making, when trusting Tom with his safety had literally almost gotten him killed less than three hours ago, that Harry suddenly knew, without a doubt, that Tom had planned all of their conversation on Parseltongue so that it would lead to exactly that assumption being made on Harry's part.

Tom had used the discussion they'd been having as a way to calm Harry down, to distract him from what had happened, to remind him that Tom was someone who Harry could listen to and trust with his safety, just like he'd done before. Answering his questions easily and with additional facts just because he knew Harry liked additional facts, all the while reminding Harry to care for his health and even stopping him from starting a different experiment that both of them knew was ill-advised, but which both of them also knew Harry would *still* want to attempt, and so Tom had had to intervene by suggesting he simply do it at a different time, when it was more *appropriate*.

And if this had been the first time they'd had a discussion that went like this, then Harry probably wouldn't have thought much of it. But it wasn't.

It wasn't even *close* to the first time this kind of thing had happened, but Harry had just never realized how much it had affected him.

Harry had started asking Tom questions about his experiments - on pretty much any subject that didn't directly deal with spells - pretty much as soon as he'd realized how smart the other boy was, and Tom had always been delightfully helpful with them. Not so much that it felt like he was necessarily happy about it, but definitely enough that Harry had always felt like he *could* come back to him with questions, and he had, again and again and again.

But Tom hadn't only been helpful by answering Harry's direct questions, he'd also often stopped Harry from hurting himself, by giving him unprompted suggestions on safer ingredient or methodology alternatives when he *knew* Harry was attempting something particularly reckless, or in a few rare cases by simply telling Harry *not* to do something. Which, Harry had learned to listen to and follow all of Tom's suggestions *very quickly*, and he'd never once suffered for it.

And Harry hadn't realized it then, but it was clear now that those kinds of interactions had created in him some sort of...trust instinct, a subconscious belief of 'trusting Tom keeps me safe'.

Which, in hindsight, was so obviously just Tom acting in a very specific way so that he could emotionally manipulate Harry into trusting him, that Harry felt truly stupid for not having seen it for what it was. But now that he *did* see it, he...

...didn't really care.

He didn't?

He didn't, not *really*, because Tom might have been pretending to be someone he wasn't to get Harry to trust him, but he wasn't *pretending* to be brilliant.

And Tom being brilliant was the main reason Harry wanted to keep him alive in the first place.

He wasn't pretending to know about Potions and Herbology and Runes and History and Arithmancy and Magical Creatures, and all of the other topics Tom just *knew so much* about. He wasn't pretending to understand new discoveries and what they implied for fifty other related topics. He wasn't pretending to understand Harry's experiments so quickly and so easily that he could not only pick out the flaws in them almost instantly, but also come up with alternatives that were better and safer for Harry, even when Harry hadn't even asked him to do that-

*Not that he'll do that anymore, now that he doesn't have to pretend to care about me to get me to trust him.*

The thought was strange, unexpected, and Harry frowned at the faint sense of hurt it brought with it, like a tiny wooden splinter stuck in between his ribs.

*Does that matter to me? Why on earth does that matter to me, he just tried to kill me. Besides, it's not like I didn't know he was lying to me from the beginning. We've both been using each other from the start, I knew that all along.*

Harry took in a deep breath, then released it slowly.

*It was stupid of me to trust him with my safety like that in the first place. I shouldn't have done that, no matter what kind of person he was. That was just me being an idiot, it's obvious he would take*

*advantage of it.*

The splinter was not dislodged.

"He's been lying to me all this time, and that's fine," he said out loud into the empty Library. "It's also fine to want to keep him alive in spite of that. He's brilliant, so he's useful no matter what kind of person he really is. Him being terrified of dying is real, I'm certain of that, and that's enough for us to work together. But I don't *know* him, and threatening his life isn't a guarantee of anything, and I have no idea if he's even genuinely on my side right now or if he just doesn't want to die. He's extremely dangerous and extremely manipulative; no matter what he says, I can't just trust him with my safety. But as long as I keep that in mind, it's all fine."

That didn't dislodge the splinter either, but it settled something else inside him, and he had no idea what *that* was about, either.

Harry's head hurt. Maybe his injuries were just making him feel off, he should just...forget about all of this until he was healed.

Harry sighed, putting the book with the Image back into its shelf. He didn't want to bring anything with him that might tie back to the Chamber, not for now. "*Illuminare*," he said, and a second ball of light materialized above his head. Harry then guided it carefully through the dark opening that hopefully lead to stairs, still wary that something would just jump out at him even though with how much time had passed since he'd opened it he knew that it didn't really make sense to worry about that now.

But thankfully, all the light revealed was stairs.

Harry breathed out a sigh of relief, and turned back to the diary, where there were a few messages from Tom that the other had clearly chosen to leave up for Harry to see.

<<You had better be looking for an Image and not just reading a random book.>>

<<If you pass out from your injuries because you were reading instead of getting help, I'm taking your magic and killing you. I feel like this is a fair warning.>>

Harry couldn't stop himself from snorting at Tom's joke, then his expression froze as he realized that this was almost certainly not, in fact, a joke.

Well, at least Tom was picking up on his end of the deal by being honest about his plans, and he'd also guided Harry to the stairs without any tricks involved, so maybe there really was hope for their cooperation to succeed even *with* Tom constantly looking for ways to kill him.

<I'm fine, and no, I wasn't reading a book.>

<<Did you find an Image?>>

<Yes, I also found the stairs. I'll talk to you again once I'm healed.>

<<Be careful, Harry.>> Tom's magic flickered. <<Don't pass out on the stairs.>>

The words sent a cold shiver running down Harry's spine, and it took him a few seconds to answer.

<I won't.>

Tom's magic flickered again.

<<For your own sake, I hope you are right.>>

Harry didn't know how to respond to that, so he didn't.

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The climb up the stairs to the dungeons was, in a word, awful. Harry had to stop and sit down every few minutes to catch his breath, and reassess the state of both his ankle and arm. The swelling was starting to become fairly intense and Harry could feel himself growing slightly dizzy, which probably meant that the infection was advancing. He was also just in really bad shape endurance-wise; he'd never done a lot of exercise, and he knew that even if he hadn't been injured, it would still have taken him longer than was probably expected to reach the top of the stairs. He'd considered using his magic to 'lift' him up the stairs in some way, but Harry knew that his exhaustion and starts of a fever meant that there was a huge possibility that his power would simply falter in the process, and Harry had no desire to risk falling down multiple flights of stone stairs when he could just do things the significantly safer - if definitely more time consuming - Muggle way.

"I might have to start exercising," he wheezed, as he sat down for the tenth time in as many minutes. He had two *Illuminare* floating above him, one lighting the way ahead and one providing light to the portion of the stairs he was currently on, because for some reason the stairs had no light of their own. They had been constructed as a spiral around a column, so Harry had no idea how far up he was at this point, or how much longer he still had to go. He called up *Tempus*; it was nearing 5am, which meant he'd been climbing these stairs for a little under an hour.

"Merlin. I didn't realize it would be this far," he huffed out, forcing himself to keep moving even as his muscles and his lungs ached with the effort and his vision swam for a moment. "Surely it can't be much longer?"

Five minutes later, his *Illuminare* suddenly came up against a shadowy surface that its light couldn't penetrate, and Harry knew he'd reached the exit.

"Oh, thank Merlin," Harry breathed out a sigh of relief. "Get me out of here."

He gingerly walked up to the wall and placed a hand up to it. It felt solid, so he expected it to be a door, but when he actually pushed against it solidly his arm suddenly simply passed right through.

"Huh," Harry murmured. "Fancy."

He hesitated for a moment, then decided that there was no way anyone was awake at this time on the day after Christmas, and just walked on through the wall.

He emerged in a corridor shrouded in shadows, and Harry took a moment to ascertain his location. He looked back to where he'd come through, and noticed that it looked exactly like a wall. Putting his hand against it revealed it to be solid, and even pushing against it didn't do anything.

*I probably need to say 'open' in Parseltongue, but without an Image I can't use Parseltongue on command.* He'd test that theory out later.

With that, he slowly walked out of the dark corridor and into a slightly more lit area that he quickly recognized. He once again glanced at the dark corridor, wondering if it, too, would fade into a wall, but no. The dark corridor was still there.

Well. At least now Harry knew that he'd have to be fairly wary of using this entrance, in case anyone noticed him disappearing down a very dark corridor. In any case, as Tom had said, he was near the Slytherin Dormitories, which also meant he was near Snape's private quarters. Which was perfect, because that was exactly where Harry was planning to go for help.

Snape knew he hated the infirmary with a passion, and Harry felt fairly sure he could convince the Potions Professor not to force him to go by telling him this was all due to his Latin magic, which meant that Harry would also avoid getting asked too many questions he couldn't answer. He wasn't going to tell Snape he'd gone to the Chamber, for a variety of reasons, but since Snape knew about his magic and his past it would be easy for Harry to claim that an experiment had just gone wrong. Technically, he wasn't even lying.

But as Harry took a step into the familiar corridor he suddenly found himself having to stop and look around him for another moment. There was something odd about the empty, dark dungeon walls that he'd seen hundreds of times before, like a filter on top of his eyes that made everything look almost like...

*It kind of feels like I'm still inside the Chamber. Except...I'm clearly not. It's very strange. Maybe it's the fever.*

*...that doesn't matter, I need to get help right now. Focus. Focus.*

He walked as well as he could to Snape's quarters, which only took him a few more minutes since he was already quite close by. Once there, he gently knocked on the door. He knew Snape had wards that would warn him of any students knocking on his door late at night, no matter how softly. There was no need to go about making a ruckus.

A few minutes later, the door slowly opened and Snape peered out looking distinctly disgruntled. "This better..."

"Please, I need help," Harry quickly whispered.

Snape's eyes widened at the urgency in his tone, and taking in Harry's haggard appearance, he quickly ushered him in and closed the door behind him. And maybe it was the relief he felt at finally being somewhere *safe*, but Harry suddenly felt himself becoming lightheaded, and his vision became spotty and darkened around the edges.

"Be careful!" Snape exclaimed, grabbing onto his broken arm to help steady him as he suddenly tilted off balance, and Harry gave a choked-off scream, the numbing magic not being enough to cover the sudden influx of pain.

Snape instantly released him and Harry dropped onto his knees, clutching at his arm. Tears were already running down his cheeks, and he hurriedly upped the amount of magic keeping him numb.

Snape stared at his hand, covered in blood, and his face twisted in worry and alarm. "Harry, what happened? Where are you hurt?"

Harry gasped in a breath. "Experiment...went...wrong." He took in a slow breath this time. "Arm broken. Set it. Infected. Fever. Ankle. Hurts." He knew he wasn't really making sense but he could barely speak properly. He took in another breath. Then another. *Merlin that hurt.*

Snape quickly sprung into action, moving to a separate room within his quarters and emerging a few seconds later with three potions. "Here."

Harry slowly turned his head to look at Snape. His breathing was slowly calming down, and the

tears had stopped. He still felt lightheaded, but his vision was back to normal, at least. "What are they?"

"Pain Relief Potion, Blood Replenishing Potion, and Fever Fighting Potion. I keep these on hand, as they are the most important in case of any emergency. They were designed not to react adversely to one another, and can be taken on an empty stomach. My personal recipes, much more efficient than any you can find elsewhere." He rattled off the words almost like he wasn't even thinking of what he was saying, and hurriedly crouched next to Harry to begin taking off the stoppers to the Potions. "Here, let me help you take them."

For an instant Harry thought about telling Snape that he had the pain under control, but he quickly realized it would obviously be better that he wasn't spending his magic on that sort of thing if a potion was available.

"It's fine, my other arm is fine, I can do it," he said after a few moments. Snape gave him a hard look, but then slowly put the potion back down. Harry grabbed the potions and, steeling himself for what he knew would be an awful taste, drank them down as quickly as he could. He could feel them taking effect almost instantly, and he slowly released the numbing spell until it was gone. The Pain Relief Potion worked perfectly - even better than his magic, if he was being honest. It almost felt like nothing was wrong with him anymore, but he knew better of course. Even the headache had dulled.

Snape quickly cast an diagnosis spell as they waited for the potions to settle, and Harry watched his expression become stony as, within a few seconds, a few lines of information appeared. Harry couldn't read what they said, but Snape's expression told him enough.

"Is it...bad?" The question came out in a whisper.

Snape turned to him, and his expression softened the slightest bit as his eyes caught Harry's. "Nothing I can't fix, don't worry. We'll discuss it all later."

Harry felt himself relax instantly, even though the promise of 'later' did make warning bells go off in his head.

Snape gave the diagnosis another look before turning back to Harry. "I'll bring some salve to help with the inflammation so I can actually start cleaning out the infection. Let me help get you onto the couch."

Harry waved him off. "No worries, I can get myself up." He'd just climbed up more than a dozen flights of stairs, he could move himself two feet onto Snape's couch.

Snape's expression went stony again for a moment, but he acquiesced to Harry's request and went back to the other room to get the salve. Harry gingerly pushed himself up, extremely used to the motion at this point from all the stairs, and released a sigh as he settled onto the couch just as Snape reemerged with a small pot and a box filled with medical supplies.

"I'm going to need to remove the clothes on your upper body right now so I can reach your arm," Snape said matter-of-factly, approaching the table and setting down the items. "The rest can wait until later."

"Sounds good. Can you do that with magic, or do you need me to actually take them off normally? Because I'd rather you just cut them off if that's the case, I really don't want to move my arm too much right now."

"Of course there's a specific spell for that," Snape replied absently, as he pulled out a few bandages and cotton swabs from the box. "It's one of the first spells taught to all Apprentice Healers."

"Oh. But why doesn't everyone use it, then?" Harry asked with some surprise.

"It can easily damage the clothes if the spell isn't used with extreme care, so it's only used when the state of the clothes isn't...a priority." He gave Harry's blood-soaked, ragged sleeve a pointed look.

"Fair enough," Harry said with a yawn, his exhaustion suddenly catching up to him now that he felt like he was fully out of danger, and safe in Snape's care. "So do you need me awake for this or can I take a nap? I haven't slept yet at..at all." Another yawn interrupted him mid-sentence.

Snape gripped at the bridge of his nose with a pained look on his face. "This is why you get injured, you brat. You..." He sighed, looking defeated. "I'll save the lecture for another time, but don't think I won't keep this in mind in the future. You have a lot of explaining to do."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," Harry said with a small, lopsided grin, feeling himself rapidly dropping into unconsciousness. He closed his eyes.

*I hope Tom doesn't kill me in my sleep. That would be really hard to explain,* he thought drowsily, but before the words could really register with his brain he was already fast asleep.

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The feeling of waking up to the light of the rising sun was...interesting.

Or rather the setting sun, Harry soon realized, since, as it turned out, he'd been woken up at around 4pm by Snape so he could have something to eat for the day.

He'd slept for about eleven hours, which was significantly more than what Harry usually got even when he did make a concerted effort to sleep properly, but it was the fading rays of light coming from the spelled window that really made him feel like he was finally awake. There was something about seeing the sun - even if it was just the sunset, and it was just through a spell - that seemed to chase away the last vestiges of Harry's fear that he was somehow *still* stuck in the Chamber. It felt like undeniable proof that he had, after all of that, escaped. Survived.

But the peace didn't last long.

Harry had had to explain what had happened to Snape, at least to some extent, and his excuse of an 'experiment gone wrong' had...fallen flat, to say the least. Harry had been in extremely bad shape when he'd come in and his excuse was barely believable at best, especially with how far the infection had developed by that point, and Snape had been extremely angry with Harry when he'd finally admitted it had taken him almost four hours to reach Snape from the time of the injury. Harry had then tried to excuse himself by saying that he'd gotten knocked out from an 'explosion', but Snape had waved him off, frustrated, and made him swear to be more careful in the future.

Snape obviously knew he was lying, was the thing, and it made Harry feel fairly awful, especially when even in his anger Snape didn't demand answers and instead made sure to treat Harry with as much care as he was capable of. He finally fully understood Draco's issue with 'disappointing his parents', and why the blond tried so hard to avoid doing it.

Snape didn't even try to convince him to go to the Infirmary once, clearly already aware that Harry would have refused to go unless there was no other choice. But, thankfully, Harry's injuries were actually treated fairly easily with potions Snape already had on hand - he brewed almost all of the potions used *in* the Infirmary himself, and he was also partially trained as a Healer. He even had a balm that would prevent Harry's wound from scarring over as it healed, which Harry was honestly quite thankful for; he really hadn't wanted to have to explain that kind of wound to anyone.

The one specific thing Snape had lectured him about was his use of *Reformo*. After Harry had explained what he'd done, Snape had made it clear to him that although Harry's bones *had* been aligned properly, he would still not recommend ever using such a spell again, seeing as there were too many things that could go wrong when abruptly forcing two bones to rejoin like Harry had. A blocked vein could form a thrombus that could travel to the lungs and cause a pulmonary embolism, which could easily kill Harry within a few hours. That same thrombus might instead travel to the brain, and cause a brain embolism which could kill Harry within five minute. A torn artery at an area proximal to the heart could lead to massive internal bleeding, which could easily kill Harry within ten minutes.

And those were only a few examples.

In summary, he absolutely could have died within the four hours that it took him to get out of the Chamber, and Harry was an idiot for not seeking help sooner.

Harry agreed with most of Snape's assessment, but the fact of the matter was that Harry hadn't really had a choice in most of the situation. He still stood by his decision to use *Reformo*, for one. He'd known, of course, that things could go terribly wrong when setting his arm with magic, and he still had no intention of ever putting himself in the position of having to do something like that again, but it wasn't like walking around with his bone sticking out of his arm would have been *better*. And as far as waiting four hours to seek help, Harry hadn't really been able to *get out* of the Chamber before then, so it really wasn't his fault. It certainly wasn't like Harry had stalled himself on *purpose*.

...maybe a little bit near the end, when even Tom was urging him to get out. But that was ten minutes at *best*.

Regardless, he couldn't really explain any of that to Snape, who, although aware Harry was deceiving him, clearly wasn't aware of exactly how *much* Harry was deceiving him, and Harry intended to keep it that way for the foreseeable future. In any case, he had little intention of ever placing himself in a position where he would be forced to use *Reformo* again, not to mention have to wait four hours to get help after that.

But hey, on the bright side, if he *was* ever forced to do this kind of thing again, now he had some experience!

...he didn't mention that to Snape, either. Harry didn't think his Professor would appreciate the thought *quite* as much as Harry did.

Snape had also fixed his glasses with a convenient little spell called *Oculo Reparo*. As a rule, Harry only ever used magic on the frames of his glasses, never the lens, since getting the curvature of the glass just right was completely beyond his ability to finesse. It was one thing to be able to think about aligning cells, quite another to understand exactly how much thickness each individual micrometer of a pane of glass would help correct the curvature of his congenital cornea. Harry didn't even know what his actual measurements *were*.

On the other hand, Snape had told him that there was a magical procedure that could give him

near-perfect vision. It was, however, very difficult to get an appointment with the single Medi-Witch in England who could perform it, as she'd created the spell herself almost sixty years ago and hadn't succeeded in teaching anyone else how to perform it properly. As such, she was constantly inundated with requests from all over Europe, and even if Harry was willing to pay significantly more than the standard price, he'd still likely have to wait for at least a few months before she could see him.

That being said, Harry certainly didn't mind paying a small fortune to get his eyesight fixed. This entire debacle with the basilisk had really made him feel like he needed to take every advantage he could get in a fight, and if he ended up dying because of his glasses breaking at an inopportune time he would be *quite* displeased.

So, he got Snape to send off an owl to the Medi-Witch asking if she would accept an appointment at any point during his Summer Break, making it clear he was prepared to pay a frankly ridiculous sum for the expedited process. He had hundreds of thousands of galleons; he might as well use them in something that would last him his whole life.

He'd stayed in Snape's quarters for the three days it took for most of his injuries to heal, the Potions Master needing to keep a close watch on his healing progress in case he suffered from any sudden complications, either from the infection or from the spell he'd used. Snape had conjured up a fairly nice cot that he set up in the corner of his living room, separated by a curtain for some privacy, and Harry had let himself be looked after for a few days. None of his friends were in the castle so it wasn't like anyone from his House would really notice he was gone, anyways.

But as it turned out, Harry got dreadfully bored almost instantly.

Snape didn't really let him do anything, insisting he try to sleep as much as possible, but Harry had never been good at sleeping for long periods of time and he couldn't really force himself to, even knowing it would help. He tried to talk to Snape about experiments, but the first idea he'd run by his Professor had made Snape go pale and lecture him for twenty minutes about being 'reckless and endangering himself', so Harry had changed the subject and decided never to bring it up again.

That being said, Harry knew Snape was feeling overly stressed because of Harry's injuries, and *probably* wouldn't have reacted quite that badly in different circumstances, but it made part of Harry wish he could be talking to Tom instead because *he* wouldn't have reacted badly, and would almost certainly have just given Harry suggestions on what to do to make the whole experience *safer*...

He spent the next two days trying to ingrain into himself the idea that Tom *couldn't be trusted with his safety*, and trying not to lose his mind from sheer boredom. His success at either task was questionable at best.

On the morning of the fourth day Harry finally convinced Snape to discharge him from the make-shift infirmary, and Snape agreed after making him promise that he would not, under any circumstances, engage in any strenuous physical activity or perform any experiments for at least a month, and to limit his magic usage as much as possible for at least a week. He was also to limit his ventures out of his room to meal-times and, if absolutely necessary, the Library, until the other students came back for the new school year. He was also given a strict schedule for the next week for potions to fully get rid of the infection, just in case, as well as a few nutrition potions that would help accelerate the healing he still had to do for his injuries.

Harry was also made to promise that he would immediately come back if he started feeling ill or if his injuries began flaring up again in *any* way. Harry had tried his best to reassure Snape that he was fine, and that that wouldn't be necessary, but Snape had just looked so obviously genuinely

worried for his safety that eventually Harry had relented.

He'd taken his now-fixed and washed clothes back from Snape - who had Transfigured a few sets of clean clothes for him during his stay - and then Harry was on his way back to the Slytherin Dormitories.

He was halfway there when he suddenly registered the weight of the diary in his pocket, and Harry's blood ran cold.

*Snape saw the diary.*

There was no way he hadn't. Harry had passed out that first day, and had awoken already in clean clothes that were different from those he'd been wearing the night before. Not only that, but the robe that the diary had been in had been returned to him washed and mended, which meant that there was no way Snape hadn't noticed that there was something in his pocket.

And Harry had been so focused on trying to figure out an excuse for why he was even injured in the first place, been so focused on convincing himself not to *want* to talk to Tom, been so focused on the fact that he was just losing his mind because he had nothing to do and he couldn't even talk to Snape about experiments or ideas because then Snape would get *worried*, that the fact that the diary was in his robe pocket had just...completely slipped his mind.

*I should have just left it in the Chamber. I could have easily gone back and gotten it afterwards, after I was healed.*

But Harry knew he hadn't really been thinking clearly at the time, and the idea of leaving the diary behind simply hadn't occurred to him.

*Why didn't Snape say anything? Surely he would have confronted me about having an extremely Dark object in a situation like...*

Harry's eyes widened.

*He doesn't know.*

*He can't see magic, he has no idea.*

*He just thinks it's a normal diary. Or a normal notebook, even, which would make it pretty easy to explain why I would have it at the time that an experiment went wrong.*

Snape had probably just thought Harry was carrying around a normal notebook, because he'd wanted to use it to make notes on his 'experiment'. It really was kind of an obvious assumption, and even if Snape had looked inside and seen it blank, the fact that Harry had been gravely injured would make it easy to assume that he'd simply...not gotten a chance to actually *make* any notes.

If he'd even bothered to care that much about a random book in Harry's possession. No one had ever questioned Ginny when *she'd* had it either, that was the whole point of having the soul container be a plain, black diary in the first place, that it would completely fly under the radar for anyone who didn't already know what it was. There was no *reason* for Snape to care about it, it was just a normal diary!

So really, it was fine. It was all fine. Snape didn't suspect anything, it was all fine! There was *nothing* to be worried about! Everything was under control!

Harry once again began making his way back to his Dorm, now at a much more subdued pace.

*I'm alive. I'm healed. I'm fine.*

*Everything is...under control.*

#### Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for all your support! Your comments are always a delight to read, you all make me so happy :D

I really hope you enjoyed this chapter, thank you for reading <3

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!